

**ABRAHAM
LINCOLN
THE PRAIRIE YEARS**

BY CARL SANDBURG



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PREFACE

FOR thirty years and more I have planned to make a certain portrait of Abraham Lincoln. It would sketch the country lawyer and prairie politician who was intimate with the settlers of the Knox County neighborhood where I grew up as a boy, and where I heard the talk of men and women who had eaten with Lincoln, given him a bed overnight, heard his jokes and lingo, remembered his silences and his mobile face.

The Mayor of Galesburg in 1858, Henry Sanderson, is the only individual of casual record who carried warm cistern water to a bathtub for Lincoln and saw Lincoln taking a bath. There in Galesburg Clark E. Carr, author of "The Illini," repeated Bill Green's remark about Lincoln, "He can make a cat laugh." And there Lincoln when bantered about his backwardness with women, answered, "A woman is the only thing I am afraid of that I know will not hurt me."

The folk-lore Lincoln, the maker of stories, the stalking and elusive Lincoln is a challenge for any artist. He has enough outline and lights and shadows and changing tints to call out portraits of him in his Illinois backgrounds and settings—even had he never been elected President.

Perhaps poetry, art, human behavior in this country, which has need to build on its own traditions, would be served by a life of Lincoln stressing the fifty-two years previous to his Presidency. Such a book would imply that if he was what he was during those first fifty-two years of his life it was nearly inevitable that he would be what he proved to be in the last four.

Then, too, the vortex in which he stood during the last four years of his life was forming in the years he was growing. The embryo of modern industrial society was taking shape. The history of transportation, of world colonization and world markets based on power-driven machinery, of international trade, finance, and standardization, weave through the destiny of Lincoln. He wore home-made moccasins as a boy, rawhide boots from a factory as a young man, and dressed calfskin shoes in still later years. A vast play of economic action, in whatever impressionistic manner, must move in the record of Lincoln.

And then Lincoln from a child on was intensely companionable, keenly sensitive to the words and ways of people around him. Therefore those people, their homes, occupations, songs, proverbs, schools, churches, politics, should be set forth with the incessant suggestion of change that went always with western pioneer life. They are the backgrounds on which the Lincoln life moved, had its rise and flow, and was moulder and moulded.

Of all the sources from which men are to gather impressions of the personality of Lincoln, the foremost singly important one is the collection of his letters and papers, the speeches and writings of the man himself. This is the high document, always, to be lived with and brooded over, to be scrutinized and forgotten and gone back to and searched again with all gifts of imagination, intuition, experience, prayer, silence, sacrifice, and the laughter next door to tears.

The first widely read biography of Lincoln, excluding campaign sketches, was by Josiah Gilbert Holland of New York, who characterized Lincoln as "a Christian gentleman." Ward Hill Lamon's book, in 1872, attacked the claims of Holland. Sixteen years later came the notable biography wherein William H. Herndon, the law partner of Lincoln, set forth a mass of documents, recollections, impressions. With the same period goes the ten-volume "History of Abraham Lincoln" by John G. Nicolay and John Hay, and Henry C. Whitney's "Life on the Circuit with Lincoln." The evidence seemed about complete when Ida Tarbell made her investigations that put fresh color into the early life of Lincoln, theretofore pictured as drab and miserable beyond the fact.

Death and time have obliterated people and houses that Miss Tarbell visited nearly thirty years ago with note book, camera, and portfolio; her services as a recorder and writer, her sketches, interviews, photographs, surveys, of that period of so many now vanished vestiges, are an achievement and a leading contribution.

Since then has come a friendly and human book on Lincoln from Jesse W. Weik, who had so loyally and ably collaborated with Herndon. The contributions of Dr. William E. Barton in many fields, notably that of the ancestry of Lincoln, mount into several books that form an important corner in all collections of Lincolniana.

Meantime the University of Illinois directed the production of a solid, crowded statement of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, followed by a monumental five-volume centennial history of the State of Illinois. Meantime also, the collection and classification of materials by the Illinois State Historical Society and the Chicago Historical Society has proceeded, while the Huntington, McLellan and Morgan collections and others such as those of Oliver R. Barrett, Joseph B. Oakleaf, Frederick H. Meserve, Clark Bissett, Emanuel Hertz, besides many more, have increased beyond all proportions at first considered probable.

Several thousand books, pamphlets, brochures, have been written and printed about Lincoln. The bibliography of Daniel Fish, published in 1906, listed 1,080 books. J. B. Oakleaf of Moline, Illinois, bringing the Fish enumeration to the year 1925, adds 1,600 items. A projected bibliography now under way by Emmanuel Hertz will list several hundred additional items.

In a single private collection are biographies of Lincoln in French (five

in number), German (four), Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Yiddish, Greek, Turkish, Japanese (three), Chinese (two), and Hawaiian.

At intervals and often with curious surprise, come new glints of illumination on Lincoln. Thus reminiscences gathered by Allen Thorndike Rice, Dorothy Lamon, A. K. McClure, Horace White; Eleanor Atkinson's haunting sketch of Dennis Hanks; the Old Salem league publications; the transcript by Henry C. Whitney of the "Lost Speech" of 1856; the reprint in 1921 by the Woman's Club of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, of the history of that community as written by Samuel Haycraft and published in a local newspaper in 1869.

Besides these materials I have used the reminiscences of Thomas G. Lowry, whose published volume was limited to 200 copies, and notes taken in extended conversations with Joseph W. Fifer, former Governor of Illinois and during many years an intimate of Leonard Sweet and Richard Oglesby.

In the McLellan manuscripts of the John Hay Library of Brown University, in the collections of the Chicago and Illinois Historical societies and in private collections, I have met sixty-five unpublished letters and papers in Lincoln's handwriting. I visited the Shenandoah Valley farm site of Lincoln's grandfather, the Lincoln birthplace and the Kentucky and Indiana regions, traveled down the Mississippi River, walked the docks of New Orleans, spent weeks in Springfield, Petersburg, New Salem, Bloomington, and towns in Illinois where Lincoln lived.

Lincoln's last speech in Illinois, at Tolono, I first met in a file of the *New York Herald*. Old newspaper files in the Chicago Public Library, and various source materials in the Newberry Library, were of service. The forty large volumes of newspaper clippings about Lincoln, gathered by the Chicago Historical Society during the centennial year of 1909, yielded letters, sketches, interviews, and memoirs of worthy authenticity. Local newspaper files such as *The Galesburg Republican-Register*, *The Galesburg Evening Mail*, *The Bloomington Pantagraph*, *The Alton Telegraph*, supplied quaint original material. Oliver R. Barrett loaned me an almost complete file of the *New York Herald* covering a critical period when that newspaper had at Springfield a correspondent with fine understanding of Lincoln; also Mr. Barrett supplied many rare copies of newspapers published in Illinois during the forty years previous to 1860.

Such items as letters and papers of Alexander Stephens characterizing Lincoln; the Lincoln & Herndon office as seen through the letters of Herndon to Theodore Parker in Joseph Fort Newton's book; the monographs of William H. Townsend on Lincoln as defendant and litigant; the diary of Orville H. Browning; the researches of Cole and Pease in Illinois history; the Tracy Uncollected Letters"; the studies of William E. Dodd in wheat, railroads, finance, from 1840 to 1860 and his remarkable paper, "The Fight for the Northwest"—these are but a few instances of docu-

ments and material, brought forth in the past eight years, that go to form the Lincoln impression.

We might list also the *Atlantic Monthly* publication of "The Bear Hunt" doggerel from the manuscript owned by J. Pierpont Morgan; the Black Hawk War history and the biography of Stephen A. Douglas written by Frank Stevens of Sycamore, Illinois; the Louis A. Warren brochure "From White House to Log Cabin"; biographies of James A. Buchanan and Lyman Trumbull; the Herndon broadsides and a letter of Mrs. Lincoln reprinted by H. E. Barker of Springfield, Illinois, besides that copy of the *Cleveland (Ohio) Plaindealer* which publishes for the first time the text of a letter written by Mrs. Lincoln to her husband; the Addison G. Procter recollections of the 1860 Chicago Republican convention; and the writings of Lincoln edited by Arthur Lapsley, with an introduction by Theodore Roosevelt. In so out of the way a volume as the autobiography of John James Ingalls of Kansas one comes across the first statement of an exact figure as to how much money Lincoln's campaign managers in Illinois spent to nominate him for president in 1860.

No letter—of length, or of importance as indicative of situations and characters—written by Lincoln to his wife has ever come to light publicly during all the years in which the streams of biography have run on endlessly. Such a letter, constituting a rarely fine document on the relationship between Lincoln and his wife, is loaned for use in this book through the courtesy of Alexander W. Hannah of Chicago. In the same year of 1925 we have seen the publication by Oliver R. Barrett of the 1858 address showing Lincoln with head bent in defeat just before the fall elections, hinting, with no cheap regrets, at the treachery of supposed friends and mentioning how he and his associates had been "bespattered with every imaginable odious epithet."

The Barrett collection began more than thirty-five years ago when Oliver R. Barrett as a boy of fifteen started to gather letters, manuscripts, photographs, of Lincoln and reminiscences from men and women who had met Lincoln in life. There in Pittsfield, county seat of Pike County, Illinois, the old settlers had heard Lincoln deliver speeches, had sat at turkey dinners with him, and had passed the Gilmer house, where Lincoln, going to a conference in the house, had lifted Lizzie Gilmer off the front gate, kissed her and put her back on the gate; they remembered the little red-headed boy, John G. Nicolay, who was a printer's devil at the office of the Pike County *Free Press*, and the boy John Hay who went to school and wrote "contributions" for the *Free Press*. There Barrett grew up; later he was a Peoria lawyer, familiar with the "orgmatorial" humor and savor of the old Eighth Circuit Bar and the stump politics of central Illinois; then he moved to Chicago. Keen in the scrutiny of evidence and shrewd in his analysis of documents; a man droll, inventive, quizzical and

lovable in the company of children; a long distance walker, a fisherman, story-teller, bookman; a man who takes a ten or fifteen mile hike at midnight or dawn when the impulse moves him; a man who enjoys being ungrammatical when with ungrammatical people; with the restless urge of the pony express rider modulated by the peaceful preoccupations of the antiquarian—Oliver R. Barrett requires further portraiture. As a collaborator and commentator he has given honest values to some of these pages.

Frederick H. Meserve gave full access to his collection of 200,000 photographs and was ready with seasoned counsel on Lincoln photographs; he loaned the bronze life mask for the two photographs by Edward Steichen; they deliver the enigmatic Lincoln whose range of laughter and tears was far and deep.

Going farther month by month in stacks and bundles of fact and legend, I found invisible companionships that surprised me. Perhaps a few of those presences lurk and murmur in this book.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE PRAIRIE YEARS

CHAPTER 1

IN the year 1776, when the thirteen American colonies of England gave to the world that famous piece of paper known as the Declaration of Independence, there was a captain of Virginia militia living in Rockingham County, named Abraham Lincoln.

He was a farmer with a 210-acre farm deeded to him by his father, John Lincoln, one of the many English, Scotch, Irish, German, Dutch settlers who were taking the green hills and slopes of the Shenandoah Valley and putting their plows to ground never touched with farming tools by the red men, the Indians, who had held it for thousands of years.

The work of driving out the red men so that the white men could farm in peace was not yet finished. In the summer of that same year of 1776, Captain Abraham Lincoln's company took a hand in marches and fights against the Cherokee tribes.

It was a time of much fighting. To the south and west were the red men. To the north and east were white men, the regiments of British soldiers, and Virginia was sending young men and corn and pork to the colonial soldiers under General George Washington. Amos Lincoln, a kinsman of Abraham, up in Massachusetts, was one of the white men who, the story ran, rigged out as Indians, went on board a British ship and dumped a cargo of tea overboard to show their disobedience, contempt, and defiance of British laws and government; later Amos was a captain of artillery in the colonial army.

There was a Hananiah Lincoln who fought at Brandywine under Washington and became a captain in the Twelfth Pennsylvania regiment; and Hananiah was a first cousin of Abraham. Jacob Lincoln, a brother of Abraham, was at Yorktown, a captain under Washington at the finish of the Revolutionary War. These Lincolns in Virginia came from Berks County in Pennsylvania.

Now Abraham Lincoln had taken for a wife a woman named Bathsheba Herring. And she bore him three sons there amid the green hills and slopes

of the Shenandoah Valley, and they were named Mordecai, Josiah, and Thomas. And she bore two daughters, named Mary and Nancy.

This family of a wife and five children Abraham Lincoln took on horses in the year 1782 and moved to Kentucky. For years his friend, Daniel Boone, had been coming back from trips to Kentucky.

While Bathsheba was still carrying in her arms the baby, Thomas, it happened that Abraham Lincoln sold his farm, and in accordance with the laws of Virginia she signed papers giving up her rights to her husband's land, declaring in writing on the 24th day of September, 1781, that "she freely and voluntarily relinquished the same without the Force threats or compulsion of her husband." Then they packed their belongings, especially the rifle, the ax, and the plow, and joined a party which headed down the Wilderness Road through Cumberland Gap and up north and west into Kentucky.

Abm Lincoln

Bathsba Lincoln

Abraham and Bathsheba (or Batsab) Lincoln sign their names to a deed in the courthouse of Rockingham County, Virginia.

Tall mountains loomed about them with long blue shadows at sunup and sundown as they traveled, camped, broke camp, and traveled again. And as they watched the mountains they slanted their keenest eyes on any moving patch of shrub or tree—the red men who ambushed enemies might be there.

There had been papers signed, and the land by law belonged to the white men, but the red men couldn't understand or didn't wish to understand how the land was gone from them to the white men. Besides, the red men had been fighting among themselves for favorite hunting grounds and fishing waters; there had been hundreds of years of fighting; now they were fighting white men by the same weapons, ways, and ambushes as they fought red men.

Some towns and villages then were paying a dollar to two dollars apiece for Indian scalps.

Coming through safe to Kentucky, Abraham Lincoln located on the Green River, where he filed claims for more than 2,000 acres. He had been there three or four years when, one day as he was working in a field, the

rifle shot of an Indian killed him. His children and his children's children scattered across Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, and Illinois.

Tom Lincoln, the child of Abraham and Bathsheba, while growing up, lived in different places in Kentucky, sometimes with his kith and kin, sometimes hiring out to farmers, mostly in Washington County, and somehow betweenwhiles managing to learn the carpenter's trade and cabinet-making. He bought a horse—and paid taxes on it. He put in a year on the farm of his uncle, Isaac Lincoln, on the Wautauga River in East Tennessee. He moved to Hardin County in Kentucky while still a young bachelor, and bought a farm on Mill Creek, paid taxes on the farm, kept out of debt, and once bought a pair of silk suspenders for a dollar and a half at a time when most men were using homemade hickory-bark galluses.

As Tom Lincoln came to his full growth he was about five feet, nine inches tall, weighing about 185 pounds, his muscles and ribs close-knit, so that one time a boy joking with him tried to find the places between his ribs but couldn't put a finger in between any place where a rib ended and the muscle began. His dark hazel eyes looked out from a round face, from under coarse black hair. He was a slow, careless man with quiet manners, would rather have people come and ask him to work on a job than to hunt the job himself. He liked to sit around and have his own thoughts.

He wasn't exactly lazy; he was sort of independent, and liked to be where he wasn't interfered with. A little slab of bacon with hoeecake or a little corn-bread and milk every day, and he was satisfied. He drank whisky but not often. The sober Baptists saw more of him than those who were steady at licking up liquor. He was a wild buck at fighting, when men didn't let him alone. A man talked about a woman once in a way Tom Lincoln didn't like. And in the fight that came, Tom bit a piece of the man's nose off. His neighbors knew him as a good man to let alone. And his neighbors knew him for a good workman, a handy man with the ax, the saw, the drawknife, and the hammer. Though he was short-spoken, he knew yarns, could crack jokes, and had a reputation as a story-teller when he got started. He never had much time for the alphabet, could read some, and could sign his name.

Church meetings interested him. He had been to cabins on Sunday mornings; the worshippers sat where it was half dark. Windows hadn't been cut in the walls; light came in through the door; words of the sermon came from a preacher in half-shadows. And he had gone to service in the evening when the cabin was lighted by the burning logs of the fire-place. Sometimes he felt stirred inside when a young woman kneeling on the floor would turn a passionate, longing face to the roof of the cabin and call, "Jesus, I give everything to thee. I give thee all. I give thee all. I am wholly thine!"

He had heard different preachers; some he liked better than others; some he was suspicious of; others he could listen to by the hour.

CHAPTER 2

DURING those years when Tom Lincoln was getting into his twenties, the country in Hardin County and around Elizabethtown was still wilderness, with only a few farms and settlements. Kentucky had been admitted to the Union of states; there were places in the state where civilization had dented the wilderness; but it was still a country of uncut timber, land unknown to the plow, a region where wolves and bear, wild animals and the Indians still claimed their rights and titles, with tooth and fang, claw and club and knife.

They talked in Elizabethtown about Miles Hart, who lived near by, and how he was killed by the Indians after he had used up his powder, how his wife Elizabeth and her two children were taken by the Indians, and how, on an outdoor march with the Indians, she was sent away, as Indian squaws were, by herself, to build a fire in the snow and give birth to her child. The child lived six months, but its mother was several years in the hands of the Indians before a Frenchman bought her near Detroit and sent her back to her relatives in Kentucky, where she again married and was raising a family. It was nearly twenty years since Elder John Gerrard, the Baptist preacher, had come to Hardin County. He preached nine months, and then one day, when a hunting party was surprised by Indians, all got away except Elder Gerrard, who was lame, and whether the Indians killed him, burned him at the stake, or took him along as a slave, nobody ever heard. There were many things to talk about around Elizabethtown. There was a negro living there called General Braddock, a free man; he had been given his freedom because, when his master's cabin was attacked by Indians, he had killed nine of the red men and saved the lives of his owner's family.

There was the time when Henry Helm and Dan Vertrees were killed by the Indians; a red man wrestled a gun away from a white man and had his war-ax raised to bring down and split the head of the white man; it was then Nicholas Miller, quick as a cat, made a jump, snatched the white man away and killed the Indian. One man who saw it, John Glenn, said, "Miller snatched the white man from the Indian as he would a chicken from a hawk." There was talk about how, even though the wilderness life was full of danger, men kept coming on, the Wilderness Road and the Ohio River bringing more and more settlers year by year, some speaking in one form or another the language of Daniel Boone, calling himself "an instrument ordained by God to settle the wilderness."

As the crossroads grew into settlements in Hardin County, there was

hard feeling between the crowd around Elizabethtown and the settlers in the valley over near Hodgen's mill, about where the county seat should be located and the courthouse built. On election days, when the members of the county board were chosen, the voters clashed. The hard feeling lasted nearly ten years. At least fifty combats of fist and skull took place, though it was generally understood that the only time the fighting was not strictly fair and square rough-and-tumble combat was when a young man named Bruce tried to gash his enemies by kicking them with shoes pointed with sharp iron pieces shaped like the "gaffs" which are fastened to the feet of fighting cocks, Bruce himself being a rooster-fight sport.

The first jail in Elizabethtown cost the county \$42.60. The sheriff was discouraged with it, and in 1797 a new jail was built, costing \$700.00, with stocks and whipping-post. Many of the prisoners were in for debt and both white and black men were lashed on their naked backs at the public whipping-post. The stocks were built so that each prisoner had to kneel with his hands and head clamped between two grooved planks. If the prisoner was dead drunk he was laid on his back with his feet in the stocks and kept there till he was sober.

The same year the jail was built, it happened that a man in for debt set fire to it when the jailer was away; the prisoner was nearly roasted to death but was saved, though the jail burned down; after which he was indicted for arson, and acquitted because he was a first-rate bricklayer and the town needed his work.

The time of the grand "raisin'" of the courthouse in 1795 in the middle of August was remembered; on that day forty strong men raised the frames and big logs into place while many women and children looked on, and at noon the men all crowded into the Haycraft double log-house to eat hearty from loaves of bread baked in a clay oven, roast shotes, chickens, ducks, potatoes, roast beef with cabbage and beans, old-fashioned baked custard and pudding, pies, pickles, and "fixin's."

Grand juries held their sessions in the woods alongside the courthouse. In 1798 their entire report was, "We present Samuel Forrester for profane swearing"; on several occasions they mention Isaac Hynes, the sheriff, for "profane swearing." The sheriff was a distiller and his still-house was in one year recommended for use as the county jail.

When people spoke of "the time Jacob was hung," they meant the year 1796 and the negro slave Jacob, who was "reproved for sloth" and killed his owner with an ax; a jury fixed the value of the slave at 80 pounds, or \$400; he broke jail, was taken again, and on hanging day the sheriff hired another black man "to tie the noose and drive the cart from under," leaving the murderer hanging in mid-air from the scaffold. A large crowd came in Sunday clothes, with lunch baskets, to see the law take its course.

If in that country they wished to speak of lighter things, they could

talk about pancakes; it was a saying that a smart woman, a cook who was clever, could toss a pancake off the skillet up through the top of the chimney and run outdoors and catch it coming down. Eggs were five cents a dozen. And one year a defendant in a case at law got a new trial on showing that in his case the jury, after retiring and before agreeing on a verdict, "did eat, drink, fiddle, and dance." Such were some of the community human cross-weaves in the neighborhood where Tom Lincoln spent the years just before he married.

CHAPTER 3

TOM LINCOLN was looking for a woman to travel through life with, for better or worse. He visited at the place of Christopher Bush, a hard-working farmer who came from German parents and had raised a family of sons with muscle. "There was no back-out in them; they never shunned a fight when they considered it necessary; and nobody ever heard one of them cry 'Enough.'"

Also there were two daughters with muscle and with shining faces and steady eyes. Tom Lincoln passed by Hannah and gave his best jokes to Sarah Bush. But it happened that Sarah Bush wanted Daniel Johnson for a husband and he wanted her.

Another young woman Tom's eyes fell on was a brunette sometimes called Nancy Hanks because she was a daughter of Lucy Hanks, and sometimes called Nancy Sparrow because she was an adopted daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Sparrow and lived with the Sparrow family.

Lucy Hanks had welcomed her child Nancy into life in Virginia in 1784 and had traveled the Wilderness Road carrying what was to her a precious bundle through Cumberland Gap and on into Kentucky.

The mother of Nancy was nineteen years old when she made this trip, leaving Nancy's father, who had not married her, back in Virginia. She could croon in the moist evening twilight to the shining face in the sweet bundle, "Hush thee, hush thee, thy father's a gentleman." She could toss the bundle into the air against a far, hazy line of blue mountains, catch it in her two hands as it came down, let it snuggle to her breast and feed, while she asked, "Here we come—where from?"

And after they had both sunken in the depths of forgetful sleep, in the early dark and past midnight, the tug of a mouth at her nipples in the gray dawn matched in its freshness the first warblings of birds and the morning stars leaving the earth to the sun and the dew.

And while Nancy was still learning to walk and talk, her mother Lucy was talked about in and around Harrodsburg, Kentucky, as too free and easy in her behavior, too wild in her ways. A grand jury had taken up

the case of Lucy Hanks at one session in Harrodsburg and named her to be investigated for immoral tendencies.

And whether some man on the jury or some officer of the law had a spiteful heart against Lucy or whether it was a roistering, jesting grand jury like the one that before agreeing on a verdict "did eat, drink, fiddle and dance," was not clear.

What was clear in the years that had passed was that Lucy Hanks was strong and strange, loved love and loved babies, had married a man she wanted, Henry Sparrow, and nine children had come and they were all learning to read and write under her teaching. Since she had married the talk about her running wild had let down.

After she married Henry Sparrow her daughter Nancy went under the roof of Thomas Sparrow, a brother of Henry, and Elizabeth Hanks Sparrow, a sister of Lucy. Under the same roof was an adopted boy named Dennis Hanks, a son of a Nancy Hanks who was one of three sisters of Lucy. There were still other Nancy Hankses in Hardin County and those who spoke of any Nancy Hanks often had to mention which one they meant.

Tom Lincoln had seen this particular Nancy Hanks living with the Sparrows and noticed she was shrewd and dark and lonesome. He had heard her tremulous voice and seen her shaken with sacred desires in church camp-meetings; he had seen her at preachings in cabins when her face stood out as a sort of picture in black against the firelights of the burning logs. He knew she could read the Bible, and had read in other books. She had seen a few newspapers and picked out pieces of news and read her way through.

Her dark skin, dark brown hair, keen little gray eyes, outstanding forehead, somewhat accented chin and cheek-bones, body of slender build, weighing about 130 pounds—these formed the outward shape of a woman carrying something strange and cherished along her ways of life. She was sad with sorrows like dark stars in blue mist. The hope was burned deep in her that beyond the harsh clay paths, the everyday scrubbing, washing, patching, fixing, the babble and the gabble of today, there are pastures and purple valleys of song.

She had seen tall hills there in Kentucky. She had seen the stark backbone of Muldraugh's Hill become folded in thin evening blankets with a lavender mist sprayed by sunset lights, and for her there were the tongues of promises over it all.

She believed in God, in the Bible, in mankind, in the past and future, in babies, people, animals, flowers, fishes, in foundations and roofs, in time and the eternities outside of time; she was a believer, keeping in silence behind her gray eyes more beliefs than she spoke. She knew . . . so much of what she believed was yonder—always yonder. Every day came

scrubbing, washing, patching, fixing. There was so little time to think or sing about the glory she believed in. It was always yonder. . . .

The day came when Thomas Lincoln signed a bond with his friend, Richard Berry, in the courthouse at Springfield in Washington County, over near where his brother, Mordecai, was farming, and the bond gave notice: "There is a marriage shortly intended between Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks." It was June 10, 1806. Two days later, at Richard Berry's place, Beechland, a man twenty-eight years old and a woman twenty-three years old came before the Reverend Jesse Head, who later gave the county clerk the names of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks as having been "joined together in the Holy Estate of Matrimony agreeable to the rules of the Methodist Episcopal Church."

After the wedding came "the infare," the Kentucky style wedding celebration. One who was there said, "We had bear-meat, venison, wild turkey and ducks, eggs wild and tame, maple sugar lumps tied on a string to bite off for coffee or whisky, syrup in big gourds, peach-and-honey; a sheep that two families barbecued whole over coals of wood burned in a pit, and covered with green boughs to keep the juices in; and a race for the whisky bottle."

The new husband put his June bride on his horse and they rode away on the red clay road along the timber trails to Elizabethtown. Their new home was in a cabin close to the courthouse. Tom worked at the carpenter's trade, made cabinets, door-frames, window sash, and coffins. A daughter was born and they named her Sarah. Tom's reputation as a solid, reliable man, whose word could be depended on, was improved after his quarrels with Denton Geoheagan.

He took a contract to cut timbers and help put up a new sawmill for Geoheagan; and when Geoheagan wouldn't pay he went to law and won the suit for his pay. Geoheagan then started two suits against Lincoln, claiming the sawmill timbers were not cut square and true. Lincoln beat him in both suits, and noticed that afterward people looked to him as a reliable man whose word could be depended on.

It was about this time the building of the third Hardin County jail was finished in Elizabethtown, with an old-time dungeon underground. The first jailer was Reverend Benjamin Ogden, who was a Methodist preacher, also a chair-maker and worker in wood.

In May and the blossom-time of the year 1808, Tom and Nancy with little Sarah moved out from Elizabethtown to the farm of George Brownfield, where Tom did carpenter work and helped farm.

The Lincolns had a cabin of their own to live in. It stood among wild crab-apple trees.

And the smell of wild crab-apple blossoms, and the low crying of all wild things, came keen that summer to the nostrils of Nancy Hanks.

The summer stars that year shook out pain and warning, strange laughers, for Nancy Hanks.

CHAPTER 4

THE same year saw the Lincolns moved to a place on the Big South Fork of Nolin's Creek, about two and a half miles from Hodgenville. They were trying to farm a little piece of ground and make a home. The house they lived in was a cabin of logs cut from the timber near by.

The floor was packed-down dirt. One door, swung on leather hinges, let them in and out. One small window gave a lookout on the weather, the rain or snow, sun and trees, and the play of the rolling prairie and low hills. A stick-clay chimney carried the fire smoke up and away.

One morning in February of this year, 1809, Tom Lincoln came out of his cabin to the road, stopped a neighbor and asked him to tell "the granny woman," Aunt Peggy Walters, that Nancy would need help soon.

On the morning of February 12, a Sunday, the granny woman was there at the cabin. And she and Tom Lincoln and the moaning Nancy Hanks welcomed into a world of battle and blood, of whispering dreams and wistful dust, a new child, a boy.

A little later that morning Tom Lincoln threw some extra wood on the fire, and an extra bearskin over the mother, went out of the cabin, and walked two miles up the road to where the Sparrows, Tom and Betsy, lived. Dennis Hanks, the nine-year-old boy adopted by the Sparrows, met Tom at the door.

In his slow way of talking—he was a slow and a quiet man—Tom Lincoln told them, "Nancy's got a boy baby."** A half-sheepish look was in his eyes, as though maybe more babies were not wanted in Kentucky just then.

The boy, Dennis Hanks, took to his feet, down the road to the Lincoln cabin. There he saw Nancy Hanks on a bed of poles cleated to a corner of the cabin, under warm bearskins.

She turned her dark head from looking at the baby to look at Dennis and threw him a tired, white smile from her mouth and gray eyes. He stood by the bed, his eyes wide open, watching the even, quiet breaths, of this fresh, soft red baby.

"What you goin' to name him, Nancy?" the boy asked.

"Abraham," was the answer, "after his grandfather."

Soon came Betsy Sparrow. She washed the baby, put a yellow petticoat and a linen shirt on him, cooked dried berries with wild honey for Nancy,

** These words are from the Eleanor Atkinson interview with Dennis Hanks. Throughout this work conversational utterances are based word for word on sources deemed authentic.—The Author.

put the one-room cabin in better order, kissed Nancy and comforted her, and went home.

Little Dennis rolled up in a bearskin and slept by the fireplace that night. He listened for the crying of the newborn child once in the night and the feet of the father moving on the dirt floor to help the mother and the little one. In the morning he took a long look at the baby and said to himself, "Its skin looks just like red cherry pulp squeezed dry, in wrinkles."

He asked if he could hold the baby. Nancy, as she passed the little one into Dennis's arms, said, "Be keerful, Dennis, fur you air the fust boy he's ever seen."

And Dennis swung the baby back and forth, keeping up a chatter about how tickled he was to have a new cousin to play with. The baby screwed up the muscles of its face and began crying with no let-up.

Dennis turned to Betsy Sparrow, handed her the baby and said to her, "Aunt, take him! He'll never come to much."

So came the birth of Abraham Lincoln that 12th of February in the year 1809—in silence and pain from a wilderness mother on a bed of corn-husks and bearskins—with an early laughing child prophecy he would never come to much.

And though he was born in a house with only one door and one window, it was written he would come to know many doors, many windows; he would read many riddles and doors and windows.

The Lincoln family lived three crop years on the farm where baby Abraham was born. It was a discouraging piece of land with yellow and red clay, stony soils, thick underbrush, land known as "barrens." It was called the Rock Spring farm because at the foot of one of its sloping hills the rocks curved in like the beginning of a cave; coats of moss spotted the rocks and rambled with quiet streaks of green over the gray; a ledge of rock formed a beckoning roof with room for people to stand under; and at the heart of it, for its centre, was a never-ending flow of clear, cool water.

With the baby she called Abe in her arms, Nancy Hanks came to this Rock Spring more than once, sitting with her child and her thoughts, looking at running water and green moss. The secrets of the mingled drone and hush of the place gave her reminders of Bible language, "Be ye comforted," or "Peace, be still."

Cooking, washing, sewing, spinning, weaving, helping keep a home for a man and two babies, besides herself, in a one-room cabin, took a good deal of her time. If there were flies creeping over the face of the baby Abe, she had to drop her work and shoo the flies away. There were few hours in the year she was free to sit with her child and her thoughts, listening to the changing drone and hush of Rock Spring saying, "Be ye comforted," or "Peace, be still."

The baby grew, learning to sit up, to crawl over the dirt floor of the cabin; the gristle became bone; the father joked about the long legs getting longer; the mother joked about how quick he grew out of one shirt into another.

Sparrows and Hankses who came visiting said, "He's solemn as a papoose." An easy and a light bundle he was to carry when the family moved to a farm on Knob Creek, eight miles from Hodgenville, on the main highway from Louisville to Nashville.

CHAPTER 5

ON the Knob Creek farm the child Abraham Lincoln learned to talk, to form words with the tongue and the roof of the mouth and the force of the breath from lungs and throat. "Pappy" and "Mammy," the words of his people meaning father and mother, were among the first syllables. He learned what the word "name" meant; his name was Abraham, the same as Abraham in the Bible, the same as his grandfather Abraham. It was "Abe" for short; if his mother called in the dark, "Is that you, Abe?" he answered, "Yes, Mammy, it's me." The name of the family he belonged to was "Lincoln" or "Linkun," though most people called it "Linkern" and it was sometimes spelled "Linkhorn."

The family lived there on Knob Creek farm, from the time Abe was three or so till he was past seven years of age. Here he was told "Kaintucky" meant the state he was living in; Knob Creek farm, the Rock Spring farm where he was born, Hodgenville, Elizabethtown, Muldraugh's Hill, these places he knew, the land he walked on, was all part of Kentucky.

Yet it was also part of something bigger. Men had been fighting, bleeding, and dying in war, for a country, "our country"; a man couldn't have more than one country any more than he could have more than one mother; the name of the mother country was the "United States"; and there was a piece of cloth with red and white stripes having a blue square in its corner filled with white stars; and this piece of cloth they called "a flag." The flag meant the "United States." One summer morning his father started the day by stepping out of the front door and shooting a long rifle into the sky; and his father explained it was the day to make a big noise because it was the "Fourth of July," the day the United States first called itself a "free and independent" nation.

His folks talked like other folks in the neighborhood. They called themselves "pore" people. A man learned in books was "edicated." What was certain was "sartin." The syllables came through the nose; joints were "jints"; fruit "spiled" instead of spoiling; in corn-planting time they "drapped" the seeds. They went on errands and "brung" things back.