

The Book of the Week.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.*

Mr. Hernden tells the story of Abraham Lincoln's life in a simple, straightforward, and convincing manner, and though his style has none of the niceties of phraseology and choice of words of a master of literature, he has the advantage of an intimate knowledge of the subject of his biography, and the power of telling his estimate of his character in vigorous language, so that by the time we have finished the two volumes we have a very vivid picture to store away in our minds of Abraham Lincoln, and of the strength of character that, even more than his power of brain, enabled him to raise himself from his lowly origin to be president of the United States of America. Lincoln's mother, "Nancy Hanks," came of a race of people that were peculiar to the civilization of early Kentucky; they were illiterate and superstitious, and the early part of the Biography is taken up with accounts of the strange religious ceremonies that were performed in that part of America in the early part of this century.

The Hanks, we are told, were the finest singers and shouters in the country.

Lincoln's early life was one of toil and little ease; he walked seven miles every day to the mill where he worked, and then it was only a hand-mill that ground from 15 to 20 bushels of corn in a day.

In 1818, a mysterious epidemic visited Pigeon Creek, to which Lincoln's mother fell a victim; and after her death, Abe and his sister Sarah began a dreary life, one more cheerless and less inviting seldom has fallen to the lot of any child to endure; but after a time his father married again. The courtship is amusingly described:—

"Miss Johnston (said he), I have no wife, and you have no husband. I came a-purpose to marry you. I knowed you from a gal, and you knowed me from a boy. I've no time to lose, and if you're willin', let it be done straight of."

Next morning they were married, and the new step-mother seems to have worked with true womanly courage "to make right that which seemed wrong." Of young Abe she was especially fond, and her kindness and care for him were warmly and bountifully returned by her stepson.

Abe's love of books, and his determined and courageous efforts to obtain an education in spite of almost overwhelming obstacles, were met with little sympathy by his father.

"Amid such restricted and unromantic environments, the boy developed into the man. . . . Although denied the requisite training of the school-room, he was none the less competent to cope with those who had undergone that discipline. No one had a more retentive memory. If he read or heard a good thing it never escaped him. His powers of concentration were intense, and in the ability through analysis to strip bare a proposition he was un-

excelled. His thoughtful and investigating mind dug down after ideas, and never stopped till bottom facts were reached."

The abortive issue of the several love affairs through which Lincoln passed embittered his character for a time. All the young ladies seem to have felt his want of manners, and did not consider that his mental powers compensated them for his want of tact and inability to show them small attentions. From the first he was more at home in the company of men, who were always "fascinated by his story-telling powers." In 1841, after many vicissitudes, he married Miss May Todd, who seems to have been a veritable Xantippe. Lincoln hid his sufferings like a Spartan, but once when a man came to him to demand satisfaction for his wife's too energetic language, Lincoln listened for a moment to his story, and then asked him sadly:—

"Can't you endure for a few moments what I have had as my daily portion for the last fifteen years?"

Mrs. Lincoln, because of her temper, could never keep a servant, and it is pathetic to read how her poor husband, in order to gain a few shreds of quiet, secretly paid one of their servants an extra dollar a week on condition that "she should brave whatever storms might arise without complaint."

Lincoln was not a technical Christian, and was utterly incapable of insincerity or professing views on the subject of religion that he did not entertain. But in illustration of his religious code he once said: "When I do good, I feel good; and when I do bad, I feel bad—and that's my religion."

In November, 1860, he was elected President.

Hernden fails to give us a graphic picture of the political life of Lincoln as President of the United States of America (probably he saw less of his former friend and partner), but the history of Lincoln's assassination at the theatre by Booth is well and vigorously told.

The feeling throughout the country was intense, and Lincoln's own words over the dead at Gettysburg came back to many as his stately funeral car went by.

"The world will little note what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here."

On the 22nd of February, 1886, as he raised the American flag over Independence Hall, in Philadelphia, he spoke of the sentiments in the "Declaration of Independence" which gave Liberty, not only to his country, but—

"I hope (he said) to the world for all future times. But if this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle. . . . I would rather be assassinated upon this spot than surrender it."

* Abraham Lincoln—The true story of a great life by William H. Hernden and Jesse W. Weik—Illustrated—Sampson Low & Sons, 1893.

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[previous page](#)

[next page](#)