

In the Footsteps of
the Lincolns

INTRODUCTION

~~IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE LINCOLNS~~

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~~After many months of travel, of close research and actual contact with the localities concerned, Miss Tarbell has written a Lincoln book which will in many ways over-turn the established Lincoln tradition. The rail-splitter, poor white trash stock which has been popularly accepted as the ancestry of Abraham Lincoln, does not exist. Miss Tarbell proves it. Not only does she prove it, but she tells the history of the Lincolns in America since the seventeenth century in a most fascinating way.~~

The long line of courageous, hardy, industrious and tolerant men from whom Abraham Lincoln came have had scant recognition by American biographers. They have lain buried in genealogies and county records and even today are called by those who should know better vagrants and loafers. This book is a first attempt to take them up one by one and prove by documents that they are worthy of their great heir -- the kind of stuff out of which strong sons are made.

The treatment accorded Thomas Lincoln, the father of the president, by biographers has always been particularly ignorant and contemptuous. The author has made a first attempt here to show him a better man than he has been painted. Thomas Lincoln was the child of an advancing pioneer army. His father fell in that advance, shot by Indians. The boy, orphaned, made himself a place in a new country, acquired land, became a good craftsman, held various local offices, was a trustee of his church -- its moderator and committeeman again and again -- a trusted, respected man. In the end he fell a victim to

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PREFACE

This book reports a pilgrimage undertaken to refresh and enlarge my previous studies of the life of Abraham Lincoln. The pilgrimage began in Hingham, Massachusetts, where two hundred eighty-five years ago the first of the family line, Samuel Lincoln, a boy of seventeen, came as a pioneer; it passed from there to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, into Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois.

I found it an inspiring thing to trace the roads these seven successive generations of Lincoln pioneers travelled, to look upon the remains of their homes, reconstruct from documents and legends their activities, judge what manner of men and women they were, the place they held among their fellows. In these wanderings the whole history of the United States seemed to unroll before me. In this Lincoln migration we have the family history of millions of our contemporaries.

And this story of their vigorous, independent pioneering, their passion for self-help and self-rule, go far to account for Abraham Lincoln. He was not an accident. These Lincolns were behind him, preparing for the miracle.

Not only has this pilgrimage given me at least a partial explanation of Abraham Lincoln, it has broken down more than one accepted tradition of his youth and his immediate forebears. There is the old notion that Thomas Lincoln, his father, was a shiftless vagrant, poor in mind and spirit. There is abundant evidence to

show the tradition a libel. Thomas Lincoln was the child of an advancing pioneer army. His father fell in that advance, shot by Indians. The boy, orphaned, made himself a place in a new country, acquired land, became a good craftsman, held various local offices, was a trustee of his church - its moderator and committeeman again and again - a trusted, respected man. In the end he fell a victim to disease - attacked at fifty, he never rallied. We do not despise the soldier who in a front line of battle is wounded, gassed, checked beyond action. We pity and honor him. Thomas Lincoln was a pioneer soldier, a victim of the conditions under which the advance was made.

Again there is the tradition that Abraham Lincoln's childhood and youth were passed in hopeless and sordid poverty and hardship. There was poverty and hardship, but it was never hopeless therefore never sordid. They were regarded as a necessary stage in the great undertaking of opening, taming and developing a new land. These men knew what they sought. To treat them as vagrants is to fail to understand the spirit of the pioneer. Abraham Lincoln's youth was passed in one of the most daring and promising struggles to which American men have ever put their hands. He weathered it, expanded under it, saw the meaning of it - and flung himself into the struggle to realize literally the great creed of Liberty for which his forebears had made their sacrifices.

As the attempt to trace the footsteps of these forebears has broken down for me the "poor white" tradition, so the attempt

to follow anew Lincoln's footsteps through his Illinois life has intensified my feeling that his rise to power was one of the most logical in our history. It was the natural triumph of an active ambitious imagination - a stern purpose to develop both mind and character and to drive them in the same harness - a passion for fair play and free opportunity - great mental and moral qualities rigorously trained and kept steadily at work, brought Abraham Lincoln into the Presidency of the United States where this book leaves him.