ILLUSTRATIONS

for

CHAPTER XXII

1) Portrait of Abraham Lincoln, believed to have been made in Washington in 1848. This portrait is from a Daguerreotype owned by the Hon. Robert T. Lincoln, and was first given to the public by Mr. Lincoln in 1896, through the medium of McClure's Magazine. Note how it contradicts the tradition of Lincoln's slovliness in dress. This is the picture of a carefully dressed man.

2) Fac-simile of an agreement drawn up by Lincoln, renting for one year his home in Springfield. The agreement bears the date of October 23, 1847, and the lessee was to take possession four days later, meaning, probably, that the Lincolns had by that time started for Washington.

3) Washington City in about 1850 as seen by an engraver. Reproduced from "Behn's Handbook of Washington." Note the character of the buildings on Pennsylvania Avenue. Also the unsettled hills which now make up the great North-West of the city.

4) Tiber Creek, from an old print. The Tiber - otherwise Goose Creek - was a familiar feature of the city of Washington in the 30's and 40's. It ran into an estuary of the Potomac, near the foot of what is now 17th Street. A railroad from the north crosses the Tiber not a great distance from where the Union Station now stands. What is now a thickly settled district was in the 40's a sparsely settled farming section.

5) The Capitol in Washington in 1848, when Lincoln first saw it. From a print of the times.

6) Cartoon of the White House in the 40's, with the afternoon crowd in the garden. By Robert Cruikshank.
This cartoon and the old print of the Capitol and Tiber Creek, as well as many other interesting prints of the period, are most readily available to readers in J. Lee Phillips "Beginning of Washington."

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IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

CHAPTER XXII

Abraham Lincoln Sees the World

When Abraham Lincoln left Springfield, Ill., in November of 1847, to take his seat as a member of the Thirtieth Congress, he must have felt much of that inner excitement and anticipation which goes with one's first deliberate journey abroad. Not since the years when as a boat hand he had travelled the Mississippi to New Orleans had he made a real journey - never had he made one under so happy and promising circumstances. He was like a hard worked man who, tied by responsibilities all his life, has come to a point where he can break away, go to Europe, to the Orient - "see the world."

Things had been put into pretty good shape at home. His young law partner, Billy Herndon, now two years with him, if inexperienced and temperamental, was loyal to the core, proud of his chief, asking nothing better than to labor and to sacrifice for him. He had rented his house for Ninety dollars for the year; he was taking Mary Lincoln and Bob and Ed - the one four years old, the other eighteen months. He was going to visit his Kentucky friends and relatives, and then, for the first time, to see Washington.

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He would look forward to that. His patriotism was too pure and strong a sentiment for him not to feel that the capital of the country was a sacred place. He probably saw it more or less with the eyes of the engravers of the period who certainly made it a beautiful thing - ignoring its defects, picturing it as it was hoped it one day would be. The town, when Mr. Lincoln first saw it, had its beautiful spots: the capitol and its immediate surroundings, a few fine old homes, with their great gardens, the White House; but in reality it was a straggling and disorderly place. Pennsylvania avenue, the heart of the town, was roughly cobbled, many of its buildings only partially built up, and low and mean. The Tiber (alias Goose Creek) rambled down from the northeast across the avenue into the Potomac, which thrust irregular, sluggish arms into what is now the Mall and the beautiful Potomac drive. Animals fed and rooted in the fields below the capitol and the White House then, while in every direction were scattered squalid settlements of negroes - Crow Hill, Negro Hill, Swampdoodle. But these unpleasant sights did not interfere with a buoyant, dignified and even brilliant social life. Washington had some 3600 inhabitants at this time and most of them were in the streets on pleasant days. Robert Cruikshank's cartoon of the White House of the 40's gives a notion of afternoons and evenings in the vicinity of the president's mansion. Here all the Washington world drove and promenaded and in the throng you might meet anybody - Mr. Clay, Mr. Webster, Mr. Calhoun, even the President himself walked

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almost daily in the crowd.

Although everybody promenaded near the White House, members of Congress usually lived near the Capitol. There were probably seventy-five or a hundred boarding houses on Pennsylvania avenue and Capitol Hill - Congressmen's messes. The Lincolns went to Capitol Hill.

It is a mistake to think of Lincoln in this first Washington experience as a strange or lonely man. Already he knew very well most of the members of the Illinois delegation - one of them very well indeed, and for a long time had had his opinion of him - the most brilliant and successful man that had come out of Illinois, Stephen A. Douglas, just elected to the United States Senate, and inclined to patronize his colleague of the 30's in the Illinois Assembly. He remembered Mr. Lincoln, oh, yes. He had served with him in the legislature back in '36, but Mr. Lincoln had been "submerged", lost sight of as a public man since. As for himself, well, of course, he had always been in sight!

Lincoln knew the Illinois people and he knew well the record of every man of importance in Congress - knew it from first hand study of Congressional documents - a political literature easy to obtain, and which he had always followed zealously. He knew fairly well the currents of opinion in the localities from which these men came - knew it from his wide reading of newspapers. Thus he had a fairly substantial background of knowledge of men and opinions in the body of

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which he was to become a member.

One gets an impression from a reading of his letters and speeches and the recollections of him men haveset down at this period, of a man taking hold with zest, making the most of every contact. His colleagues in the mess at Mrs' Sprigg's on Capitol Hill found at once and with delight that the tall Whig from Illinois was a wonderful table companion - modest, a good listener, gentle, full of fun, quick at repartee, a side-splitting story teller - and more still, a very serious and thoughtful fellow. In more than one established informal group - the kind of gathering inclined to be jealous of its personnel, slow to admit new-comers to intimacy, Lincoln after a few days on the outskirts, was admitted to full fellowship. It was so at the bowling alley on the hill, at the group of choice story tellers in the House Post Office, at Mr. Webster's breakfasts. In all these gatherings he came to be looked for, welcomed warmly, remembered after his term was over. More than one writer of his reminiscences of Washington in '48 and thereabouts has left a picture of Abraham Lincoln in these groups, something definite, characteristic.

He went to work at once - a little more freely, from a political point of view perhaps than if he had been a candidate for re-election. He was not' He had repeatedly announced in his campaign that he still held to the principle of turn-about which he had unwisely brought into being in the convention of 1843. He knew that his former law partner, Stephen A. Logan, was a candidate, and he felt that it was right that he should have the next term. Logan had worked faithfully

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for him - indeed, had made the speech nominating him. He did not intend to stand in his way, and when Billy Herndon and others wanted to go to work at once to make ready for his re-election, he quite decidedly put his foot down. He was not a candidate - not if Logan was. This fact, however, had nothing to do with his energy and firmness in taking hold of congressional work. Lincoln seems to have gone to Washington with the idea of making the tariff his principal interest - at least the tariff was the only issue, so far as we know, for which he had made special preparations. With Congressmen, however, as with men and women in most positions of responsibility, it is usually not the thing that you prepare to do that you do do.

He never got a chance to make his tariff speech. He dropped it to accept the challenge President Polk threw down in his message. Polk was determined not only to get supplies for the Mexican War then in progress but a vote declaring it a just and necessary war. He insisted that Mexico had made the war inevitable by "invading our territory" and "shedding the blood of our fellow citizens on our soil." This was too much for Lincoln, who had always contended that Polk had not only provoked the war but begun it unconstitutionally. He took issue at once with the effort of the Administration to get a clean bill of health. "Where was the spot," he asked "on which the blood of our citizens was shed?" "Was it in our territory or in Mexican territory?" He questions were so cleverly phrased, the

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arraignment of the President with which he followed up his "spot Resolutions" so able that the Whig side of the House was delighted. Here was a recruit worth cultivating. They saw in Lincoln at once certain important political qualities - that he was not afraid to speak his mind even in a body like Congress which might naturally be expected to awe him into silence for a time. As a matter of fact Lincoln found himself at once quite at home on the floor, "about as badly scared and no more as I am when I speak in court." The Whigs found him informed - with a genuine interest in facts, willing to work to get them, and surprisingly cunning in handling them. All this brought him at once into the inner confidential Whig circle, busy at the moment in selecting a candidate for the presidential election of 1848.

All of this Lincoln enjoyed immensely. He was popular, trusted, listened to, admitted. But his success with the Whig circle in Washington had an offsetting feature at home. He probably had not foreseen that his fight on Polk would shock his district. The Sangamon country might be Whig in principle but it would not stand for criticism of a war while the war was on. More than one of his good friends, Billy Herndon among them, protested. Herndon was thrown into a panic by the harm that his course was doing to his political strength. There is nothing ~~of this period~~ that shows Lincoln's capacity for clear thinking and expression at this period as well as his intellectual firmness when he had come to a conclusion which he believed sound than the letters that he wrote ~~at this time~~ to his

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Illinois critics. There was one to a minister, the Rev. J.M.Peck, in his best controversial form, strongly suggestive of many a letter which he was to write in the last six years of his life. He drove the question of the war down to the facts. What were the facts? He reviewed them - the invasion of Americans into peaceful Mexican territory:

> ". . . What is the result of your reflections upon them?" he asked. "If you deny that they are facts, I think I can furnish proofs which shall convince you that you are mistaken. If you admit that they are facts, then I shall be obliged for a reference to any law of language, law of States, law of nations, law of morals, law of religions, any law, human or divine, in which an authority can be found for saying these facts constitute 'no aggression.'
>
> "Possibly you consider those acts too small for notice. Would you venture to so consider them had they been committed by any nation on earth against the humblest of our people? I know you would not. Then I ask, is the precept "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you even so to them' obsolete? of no force? of no application?"

Pretty spirited, clear-headed expression this - not at all a man ~~of this time~~, as some biographers have hinted, that did not know his own mind. Throughout the year there was no outward political wavering. He welcomed the nomination in June of Gen. Zachariah Taylor - depending of course upon his war record, his freedom from any kind of political alliances, willing even to slide over the fact that he was a slave owner, and, so far as anybody knew, had no views of any sort on the slavery question. He went with alacrity into the campaign and kept it up to the election, going to New England in the fall, and then home to steady political speaking.

If we put together all that we have of his writing and

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speaking in the year we find hardly a hint of the fact he had been following in the Thirtieth Congress a tremendous and prophetic discussion - a discussion in which there came out all those shades of opinion and of emotion on the question of slavery which later were to grown and harden until they drove all other opinions and emotions from men's minds, assuming finally such rigor reign and power that men no longer could control themselves, became their puppets, and fell back on war to settle that which mind and conscience had started but were still too undeveloped to carry on to logical peaceful conclusion.

It was the acquisition and government of new territory that forced slavery to the front. There was Oregon - Texas - the land that we were compelling Mexico to sell us - should they all be free? Should Congress declare them free, as in 1787 it had declared the North-west? David Wilmot of Pennsylvania had attached an amendment to the bill appropriating money for settling with Mexico, which made the funds conditional on slavery being excluded forever from any portion of the acquired territory. The South incensed, fought the proviso. Lincoln heard his friend Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia go so far as to threaten, if the combined vote of the North carried the Wilmot proviso, it would be for the South to take her own course - and he - why he would go with them - Secession!

~~And at intervals he heard long protests from those who~~

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He listened to violent and noisy arraignments of the institution by men from free States - ridiculed by men from slave States. He heard attacks and defenses - Constitutional - economic - social - religious. He heard the doctrine of "squatter sovereignty" announced and defended.

And at intervals he heard long protests from those who wanted to "do business", at the folly of allowing what Thomas Benton called the "pestiferous question" to absorb the whole thought of Congress. This "black question", he cried, "rises forever on the table. It is like the plague of frogs - everywhere." "I remember a time," Benton complained, " when no one would have thought of asking a public man what his opinion was on the extension of slavery any more than what was the length of his feet." Happy days - gone forever!

Forty-one different members of the House of Representatives and thirty-seven Senators spoke on one side or the other of the slavery question in this session - spoke long, sometimes wisely, often violently - but through it all Lincoln never raised his voice, save every time he had a chance, to vote yea on the Wilmot Proviso. That far he was clear - had always been clear: new territory must be free territory.

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He might keep quiet in Congress - content himself with a vote; but when he came to campaigning, it was going to be different. He saw a crumbling of the old parties going on in the North - bolting Whigs, bolting Democrats - people who demanded louder, clearer, more unmistakable expressions on keeping the new territories free - people who not only wanted these expressions but wanted denunciations of slavery as an evil, wanted to defy those who were supporting and profiting by it. And he saw rising, too, in North and South spots something which looked like fighting blood, preparing to back demands.

While he sat franking documents in Washington after the adjournment of Congress, waiting for certain speaking engagements which had been arranged for him in the month of September in Massachusetts, more and more signs and sounds of the defection came to him. While he was still there in Washington, bolting Democrats and Free Soilers held a convention in Buffalo, N.Y., led by a man that he already looked on as one of the great men of the country, Salmon P. Chase, of Ohio. There was no mistaking how this convention felt about slavery. Their slogan showed it -"Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, Free Men." So, when he came to cast up the account of New England, to which he soon was going, he found the Whigs had lost there some of their best names - and lost them because of the nomination of Taylor and his undefined position on the question of slavery.

Lincoln felt that it is was not going to be possible for him to depend for speaking material in Massachusetts on the sins of

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the Polk Administration or the military record of Gen. Taylor - he must meet the slavery issue.

His first engagement was to speak at a convention of the Whigs to be held in Worcester, and it was in this first speech that he set down that which shows clearly where he stood, - imperfect as our report of the speech is - in the long scale of opinion on slavery. It shows, too, his temper.

"The people of Illinois," he told his great Worcester audience, "agreed entirely with the people of Massachusetts on this subject, except perhaps they did not keep so constantly thinking about it. All agreed that slavery was an evil, but that we were not responsible for it and cannot affect it in States of this Union where we do not live. But the question of the extension of slavery to new territories of this country is a part of our responsibility and care, and is under our control."

So much for his views and his temper. His real task, however, was to back up New England Whigs who were wavering because of their feeling that neither platform nor candidate were satisfactory on the subject of the extension of slavery. Lincoln's argument was one of expediency. They had a program, he declared; that program could only be interpreted as against the extension of slavery. And as for the "self-named Free Soil party," what had they to offer but opposition? You settled nothing by opposition. Your intelligence was given you to find a way, a plan, work out something. ~~What could you expect of them?~~ That was what the Whigs were trying to do. And as for the Democrats who had stood with the South, what could you expect of them? Was it not absurd to suppose

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that the party that had annexed the territory against the protests of Whigs and Free Soilers could be depended upon to do anything towards keeping slavery out of it?

He made his impression - so strong an impression that invitations to speak poured in on him from all directions. He spoke at several points in the vicinity of Boston and finally in Tremont Temple in Boston, on the same platform with Governor Seward, ~~and after him~~. Seward in essence stood at this moment with Lincoln. The difference between them was the difference Lincoln had noted at Worcester between Illinois and Massachusetts. Seward was "constantly thinking about it" - Lincoln was not. Seward stirred him. Was it "irrepressible?" - this struggle between free and slave. He was not the man to refuse to believe. If the forces of those who believed in slavery and its extension were becoming stronger, more aggressive, more determined than those who believed like him that it could be kept within certain bounds, and so kept must ultimately die he must prepare to meet the new situation. He came out from Tremont Temple with Governor Seward, pondering, in hisway: "I reckon you are right," he said, "we have got to deal with this slavery question, got to give much more attention to it hereafter than we have been doing." It was that thought that was to attend him for many, many of the following months. It lay incubating in his subconsciousness on his journey home. It was with him through the weeks he spent in Illinois before his return to Congress for the short term of the winter of 1848-49. The time was coming when he must be active,

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but how be active within the law? What could he do now? - what tangible, lawful thing? There was one place in the country from which he believed that he had a legal right to work for the exclusion of slavery, and that was the District of Columbia. Twelve years before in the Assembly of Illinois he had expressed this judgment. His months in Washington had given ~~new life~~ emotion to his conviction for here he had seen every time he went to the White House, Treasury, War Department, the signs of the city's slave market. It stood on the edge of the public grounds - near the Smithsonian Institute, and to and from it, along the avenue, gangs of negroes - often chained - were driven daily. To have this vivid picture of what slavery meant - a traffic in human life - always before their eyes stirred those who hated the institution mightily. "The slave pen' of the Nation's Capitol - "under the very walls of the building that housed the Declaration of Independence" appeared in more than one of the speeches that Lincoln listened to in 1848. He did not thunder. He prepared to do something.

On January 16, 1849 he brought in a carefully framed bill to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. He brought it in, and he worked for it, soliciting votes, trying to get publicity. But the bill never came to the floor. He had done, however, all he could see to do, he had put himself on record.

And now his term was over. What had it amounted to? Men have called it a failure. It seems to me anything but that. He had proved himself an able and trustworthy national politician. He had

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shown, too, that, good politician as he was, he was not so good when it came to getting things for himself. The party had wanted to reward him, as they called it - keep him in Washington - give him a good office. The Land Office was suggested. He muddled it - not because he did not want it, but because there was a friend in the way, who also wanted it. So long as he thought that possibly there was a chance for the friend he would not apply; when he found that there was not, he made his application - but he had waited too long. His sorrow, however, was not that he was too late, but that his friend felt that possibly he had been treacherous in applying at all.

There was one positive satisfaction from the experience. Then for the first time he learned something definite of the Lincoln family, before it went into Kentucky. A fellow Congressman from the Shenandoah Valley told him of Lincolns in his district - gave him the name of one of them, a man prominent in Rockingham County, David Lincoln. He wrote at once. ~~at-once-wrote,-telling-what-he-knew.~~ His father was born in Rockingham County, he told David Lincoln, his grandfather had migrated from there to Kentucky. "What of your family," he asked. "Do you know anything of my grandfather? Do you know where my family came from when they settled in Virginia."

The answer was gratifying. It told him that his grandfather was an uncle of the David to whom he had written, that the Virginia Lincolns had come from Berks County, Pa. He was pleased, but he wanted

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more. Particularly he wanted to know whether or not the Lincolns who came into Berks County were Quakers.

I found last fall at Lacey Springs in the Shenandoah Valley where David Lincoln's descendants still live, a tradition that Mr. Lincoln at this time actually spent a night with his kinsman, either in going or coming to Washington. There is no hint of it in his letters which these descendants still treasure. It is probably unfounded. But it is rather a pity that he could not have looked in on the prosperous settlement which this grandson of John Lincoln and his brothers had built up. At the time of the correspondence, David and his brothers had some 7000 acres of land, kept an inn - famous in its day as the stopping place of all stage coaches along the highway - ran a mill, owned many slaves - prosperous Lincolns whom he would have been glad to have known. He knew so few of that class!

It is a pity, too, that when he was in Worcester, Mass., he could not have had the satisfaction of knowing that the Mayor of the city, former Governor Levi Lincoln, was a kinsman. Gov. Lincoln was of the sixth generation from the original Samuel Lincoln - Abraham of the seventh; but, although they met in Worcester - Lincoln dining in the stately Lincoln home which still stands, one of the treasures of the town - it is a tradition that he said it was the finest dinner at which he had ever sat - they knew nothing of their common origin.

When he spoke in Tremont Temple in Boston, the secretary of

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the meeting was also a kinsman, Ezra Lincoln, Jr. - a prosperous printer and a leading Whig. But they knew nothing of their common ancestor. Nor did he know that one of the military heroes of the day, Captain George Lincoln, killed at the battle of Buena Vista was of his family, and like himself of the seventh generation in America.

One gain of his Congressional experience which he particularly prized was the extension of his acquaintance. His avidity for people had a chance. He sought them out, tapped them, often made life-long friends with them. Wide as he and Alexander H. Stephens were apart, Stephens always prized his acquaintance with Lincoln, and it was at this time he learned to know him:

> "I knew Mr. Lincoln well and intimately," he says, and we were both ardent supporters of General Taylor for President in 1848. Mr. Lincoln, Toombs, Preston, myself and others formed the first Congressional Taylor Club, known as 'The Young Indians," and organized the Taylor movement, which resulted in his nomination. . . . Mr. Lincoln was careful as to his manners, awkward in his speech, but was possessed of a very strong, clear, vigorous mind. . . . He always attracted and riveted the attention of the House when he spoke. His manner of speech, as well as thought, was original. He had no model. He was a man of strong convictions, and what Carlyle could have called an earnest man. He abounded in anecdote. He illustrated everything he was talking about by anecdote, always exceedingly apt and pointed, and socially he always kept his company in a roar of laughter."

Out of these contacts came a fresh, searching appraisal of himself. He was something, if not all that he wished. He had proved he could go with the best of them - sit at Daniel Webster's breakfasts, be listened to in Tremont Temple, walk the street with

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Governor Seward, sit at Governor Lincoln's dinner table - not so bad, when he remembered Indiana, his coming into Illinois, the flat-boat, Offut's store, the odd jobs at rail splitting - but still far below his thought. Knowledge was what he lacked. Here were men that knew things that he did not know. He was going back to the law. He had told Herndon at the beginning of his term, when the latter had urged re-election upon him, that he had thought all along that the best thing for him was to return to the law after a second term. That held now, the law was all he had in mind. He must be a better lawyer, and it is to this taking hold anew of his profession in his fortieth year, that we now turn. --

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