Rauhert

The time is almost here when we shall be saying that there is no one left in the world who as a man knew Abraham Lincoln. To be sure, we shall for many years yet be adding to our gallery of impressions, sharply etched little pictures, the clear recollections of women or women who as boys or girls saw him at their father's table, watched him pitch a ball or run a race - heard him reply to Douglas, felt his strong hand and kind eyes on them as they passed through the White House line on reception days, looked on his dead face as his body lay in state in one or another of the great cities of the country; but as for reminiscences of grown-ups, they are almost past.

It is a misfortune that the great bulk of recollections of Lincoln, particularly up to his election as President, come from men who had known him so long as a neighbor, a fellow in their own occupations, that he had become common to them. Many of these men had always felt a certain superiority to him. There was Herndon, who had read more books and had so much greater facility in emotional and rhetorical expression; there were his prosperous friends who had so much better background, so much better houses, so much more money; there were his legal friends who had seen the insides of colleges and read law in the orderly, prescribed way; in the recollections of almost all of them thereis a faint odor of superiority, a little surprise at his elevation, sometimes a trace of resentment; They practically all emphasize their intimacy, claim to know all

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about him, to understand him. Their feeling was due more to the fact that he understood them and was able to make them feel at home with him than that they came anywhere near touching the bottom of his nature. As a matter of fact, all each one saw was a bit of Abraham Lincoln. Each saw and repeated what his own nature and tradition permitted him to see. Thus, recollections of Lincoln are largely a reflex of the writer.

Again the opportunity to know Lincoln enjoyed by the greater number of those who have left records, particularly in the Illinois period, was professional or political, frequently both, so generally was it true that a lawyer was also a politician. The intimacy in these cases was that of the harness, and while it bred respect, confidence, liking, it also destroyed mystery and reverence, took away the keen sense that here was an unusual human being, with depths that they had not sounded. If there came up at times some sense that there was something beyond them in this man, Lincoln himself would wipe it out by his homely ways, by the very barrier of friendliness that he put up which kept men from looking at depths in his nature which he did not want sounded.

Thus it happens that the man we get from the mass of reminiscences left of him is very much of a piece; when the reporters come to a point which baffles them, as his secretiveness and periods of silence and gloom baffled them all, they seek in themselves an explanation. Nicolay and Hay explain his melancholy largely by

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refers it to Lincoln's
indigestion - Herndon ~~by his~~ morbid belief in an irregular ancestry and ~~his~~ his inability to forget a lost love.

Recollections of Lincoln which come from those who had the opportunity to observe him closely over a considerable period but never followed the circuit or campaigned with him, particularly of those who never had the misfortune to have Lincoln become a common, everyday and usual factor in their lives, are especially precious. The recollections of Henry B. Rankin in this volume are of that character. They come from a man who had a unique chance to observe Lincoln and who was himself of a nature, an age, in a relation and with a background which give his recollections something special and different.

Henry B. Rankin was a youth under twenty when in 1856 he entered the law office of Lincoln and Herndon in Springfield. Lincoln was already to him a romantic and inspiring character. Mr Rankin was born near New Salem, he had all his life heard his father and mother talk of the beginnings of what by this time had become one of the most promising careers in Illinois. They could tell the boys of Lincoln's struggles. They knew of his early poverty, courage and ambitions, what they had seen with their own eyes or heard from his lips. To young Rankin the tale was an epic - the favorite American epic of a boy penniless, ignorant, unfriended, storming the walls of knowledge, prosperity and honor, and taking them! He had not only heard all of this from youth up but he had been old enough to share his family's pride in Lincoln's relation to that revolt against the extension of slavery

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with which they sympathized.

He entered the office of Lincoln and Herndon at the moment when this man with whose story he had grown up, had cut loose from his old political traditions and had flung himself into the revolution of the day, flung himself in with a power and an eloquence and an understanding that had made him the Illinois leader of the forces of freedom. It was a great moment indeed to become a member of Lincoln's professional family.

The picture he gives us of the intellectual life of the two partners in this period explains as nothing else I have ever read the education Lincoln was getting in the life and thought and aspirations of his time. To their table came all the leading journals of South as well as North - to be read and discussed. Here, too, came Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," pregnant lines arresting Lincoln who as he read would often go over aloud to his companion something which had stirred his imagination or pricked his heart.

Young Rankin even watched the making of the Cooper Union speech. He gives us an entirely fresh idea of the extent and the thoroughness of Lincoln's studies at the time as well as his mental habits. Here is an explanation that we did not have before of that mastery of fact and of thought characterizing the debates with Douglas and the speeches which followed them.

For four years Henry B. Rankin watched with a young man's enthusiasm and reverence the growing powers of the man - a unique chance indeed, for a clear eyed, idealistic youth. He saw in

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Lincoln a great nature grappling with great themes, a great heart, a humble mind. He saw nothing of the Rabelaisque, lank, lounging, uncouth Lincoln. It never existed for him, just as many of those about him never had a glimpse of the Lincoln that he saw. Luckily for us, years have intensified his reverence and his loyalty, his sense of the profundity of Lincoln; and this is possible because the man himself has not fundamentally changed. The acute spiritual quality that made him see Lincoln as he did has only increased with years. We have then in these recollections something different. They soften, dignify, spiritualize the Lincoln of ~~the big run~~ world- of the Illinois recollections. They are the Lincoln of a young man of high nature, ~~enriched, enlarged, humanized~~ whole struggle by sixty years of noble living, that has been kept youthful

(~~They are a precious contribution.~~)

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