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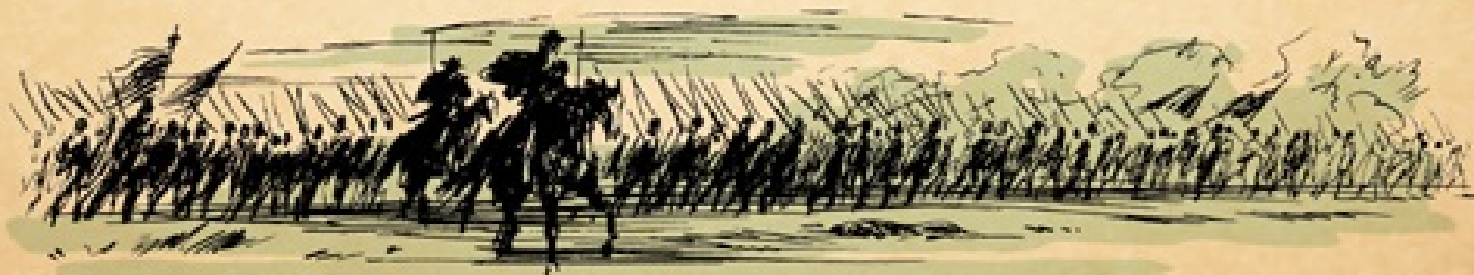
A Narrative

**WAR**

— [ VOLUME: ONE ] —

**PORT SUMTER to PERRYVILLE**

**SHELBY FOOTE**



“Monumental. . . . A classic of its kind.” —*New York Herald Tribune Book Review*

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THE  
**Civil War**  
*A Narrative*

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FORT SUMTER  
*to* PERRYVILLE

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*By* SHELBY FOOTE



VINTAGE BOOKS  
A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE  
NEW YORK

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☆ I ☆

## Prologue – The Opponents

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IT WAS A MONDAY IN WASHINGTON, January 21; Jefferson Davis rose from his seat in the Senate. South Carolina had left the Union a month before, followed by Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama, which seceded at the rate of one a day during the second week of the new year. Georgia went out eight days later; Louisiana and Texas were poised to go; few doubted that they would, along with others. For more than a decade there had been intensive discussion as to the legality of secession, but now the argument was no longer academic. A convention had been called for the first week in February, at Montgomery, Alabama, for the purpose of forming a confederacy of the departed states, however many there should be in addition to the five already gone. As a protest against the election of Abraham Lincoln, who had received not a single southern electoral vote, secession was a fact—to be reinforced, if necessary, by the sword. The senator from Mississippi rose. It was high noon. The occasion was momentous and expected; the galleries were crowded, hoop-skirted ladies and men in broadcloth come to hear him say farewell. He was going home.

By now he was one of the acknowledged spokesmen of secession, though it had not always been so. By nature he was a moderate, with a deep devotion to the Union. He had been for compromise so long as he believed compromise was possible; he reserved secession as a last resort. Yet now they were at that stage. In a paper which he had helped to draft and which he had signed and sent as advice to his state in early December, his position had been explicit. “The argument is exhausted,” it declared. “A hope of relief in the Union ... is extinguished.” At last he was for disunion, with a southern confederacy to follow.

During the twelve days since the secession of Mississippi he had remained in Washington, sick in mind and body, waiting for the news to reach him officially. He hoped he might be arrested as a traitor, thereby gaining a chance to test the right of secession in the federal courts. Now the news had been given him officially the day before, a Sunday, and he stayed to say goodbye. He had never doubted the right of secession. What he doubted was its wisdom. Yet now it was no longer a question even of wisdom; it was a question of necessity—meaning Honor. On the day before Lincoln’s election, Davis had struck an organ tone that brought a storm of applause in his home state. “I glory in Mississippi’s star!” he cried. “But before I would see it dishonored I would tear it from its place, to be set on the perilous ridge of battle as a sign around which her bravest and best shall meet the harvest home of death.”

Thus he had spoken in November, but now in January, rising to say farewell, his manner held more of sadness than defiance. For a long moment after he rose he struck the accustomed preliminary stance of the orators of his day: high-stomached, almost sway-backed, the knuckles of one hand braced against the desk top, the other hand raised behind him with the wrist at the small of his back. He was dressed in neat black broadcloth, cuffless trouser-legs crumpling over his boots, the coat full-skirted with wide lapels, a satin waistcoat framing the stiff white bosom of his shirt, a black silk handkerchi

wound stockwise twice around the upturned collar and knotted loosely at the throat. Close-shaven except for the tuft of beard at the jut of the chin, the face was built economically close to the skull and more than anything it expressed an iron control by the brain within that skull. He had been sick for the past month and he looked it. He looked in fact like a man who had emerged from a long bout with a fever; which was what he was, except that the fever had been a generation back, when he was twenty-seven, and now he was fifty-two. Beneath the high square forehead, etched with the fine crisscross lines of pain and overwork, the eyes were deep-set, gray and stern, large and lustrous though one was partly covered by a film, a result of the neuralgia which had racked him all those years. The nose was aquiline, finely shaped, the nostrils broad and delicately chiseled. The cheeks were deeply hollowed beneath the too-high cheekbones and above the wide, determined jaw. His voice was low, with the warmth of the Deep South in it.

“I rise, Mr President, for the purpose of announcing to the Senate that I have satisfactory evidence that the State of Mississippi, by a solemn ordinance of her people in convention assembled, has declared her separation from the United States. Under these circumstances, of course, my functions terminate here. It has seemed to me proper, however, that I should appear in the Senate to announce that fact to my associates, and I will say but very little more.”

His voice faltered at the outset, but soon it gathered volume and rang clear—“like a silver trumpet” according to his wife, who sat in the gallery. “Unshed tears were in it,” she added, “and a plea for peace permeated every tone.” Davis continued:

“It is known to senators who have served with me here, that I have for many years advocated, as an essential attribute of State sovereignty, the right of a State to secede from the Union.... If I had thought that Mississippi was acting without sufficient provocation ... I should still, under my theory of government, because of my allegiance to the State of which I am a citizen, have been bound by her action.”

He foresaw the founding of a nation, inheritor of the traditions of the American Revolution. “We will but tread in the paths of our fathers when we proclaim our independence and take the hazard ... not with hostility to others, not to injure any section of the country, not even for our own pecuniary benefit, but from the high and solemn motive of defending and protecting the rights we inherited, and which it is our duty to transmit unshorn to our children.” England had been a lion; the Union might turn out to be a bear; in which case, “we will invoke the God of our fathers, who delivered them from the power of the lion, to protect us from the ravages of the bear; and thus, putting our trust in God and in our own firm hearts and strong arms, we will vindicate the right as best we may.”

Davis glanced around the chamber, then continued. “I see now around me some with whom I have served long. There have been points of collision; but whatever of offense there has been to me, I leave here. I carry with me no hostile remembrance.... I go hence unencumbered by the remembrance of any injury received, and having discharged the duty of making the only reparation in my power for any injury received.” He then spoke the final sentence to which all the rest had served as prologue. “Mr President and Senators, having made the announcement which the occasion seemed to me to require, remains only for me to bid you a final adieu.”

For a moment there was silence. Then came the ovation, the sustained thunder of applause, the flutter of handkerchiefs and hum of comment. Davis shrank from this, however, or at any rate ignored it. As he resumed his seat he lowered his head and covered his face with his hands. Some in the gallery claimed his shoulders shook; he was weeping, they said. It may have been so, though he was not given to public tears. If so, it could have been from more than present tension. His life was crowded with

glory, as a soldier, as a suitor, as a statesman; yet the glory was more than balanced by personal sorrow as a man. He had known tears in his time.

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He was born in Christian County, Kentucky, within a year and a hundred miles of the man whose election had brought on the present furor. Like that man, he was a log-cabin boy, the youngest of ten children whose grandfather had been born in Philadelphia in 1702, the son of an immigrant Welshman who signed his name with an X. This grandfather moved to Georgia, where he married a widow who bore him one son, Samuel. Samuel raised and led an irregular militia company in the Revolution. After the war he married and moved northwest to south-central Kentucky, where he put up his own log house, farmed six hundred acres of land by the hard agronomy of the time, and supplied himself with children, naming the sons out of the Bible—Joseph, Samuel, Benjamin, and Isaac—until the tenth child, born in early June of 1808, whom he named for the red-headed President then in office, and gave him the middle name Finis in the belief, or perhaps the hope, that he was the last; which he was.

By the time the baby Jefferson was weaned the family was on the move again, south one thousand miles to Bayou Teche, Louisiana, only to find the climate unhealthy and to move again, three hundred miles northeast to Wilkinson County, Mississippi Territory, southeast of Natchez and forty miles from the Mississippi River. Here the patriarch stopped, for he prospered; he did not move again, and here Jefferson spent his early childhood.

The crop now was cotton, and though Samuel Davis had slaves, he was his own overseer, working alongside them in the field. It was a farm, not a plantation; he was a farmer, not a planter. In a region where the leading men were Episcopalians and Federalists, he was a Baptist and a Democrat. Now his older children were coming of age, and at their marriages he gave them what he could, one Negro slave, and that was all. The youngest, called Little Jeff, began his education when he was six. For the next fifteen years he attended one school after another, first a log schoolhouse within walking distance of home, then a Dominican institution in Kentucky, Saint Thomas Aquinas, where he was still called Little Jeff because he was the smallest pupil there. He asked to become a Roman Catholic but the priest told him to wait and learn, which he did, and either forgot or changed his mind. Then, his mother having grown lonesome for her last-born, he came home to the Mississippi schoolhouse where he had started.

He did not like it. One hot fall day he rebelled; he would not go. Very well, his father said, but he could not be idle, and sent him to the field with the work gang. Two days later Jeff was back at his desk. "The heat of the sun and the physical labor, in conjunction with the implied equality with the other cotton pickers, convinced me that school was the lesser evil." Thus he later explained his early decision to work with his head, not his hands. In continuation of this decision, just before his fourteenth birthday he left once more for Kentucky, entering Transylvania University, an excellent school, one of the few in the country to live up to a high-sounding name. Under competent professors he continued his studies in Latin and Greek and mathematics, including trigonometry, and explored the mysteries of sacred and profane history and natural philosophy—meaning chemistry and physics—with surveying and oratory thrown in for good measure. While he was there his father died and his oldest brother, Joseph, twenty-four years his senior, assumed the role of guardian.

Not long before his death, the father had secured for his youngest son an appointment to West Point, signed by the Secretary of War, and thus for the first time the names were linked: Jefferson Davis and John C. Calhoun. Joseph Davis by now had become what his father had never been—a planter, with a planter's views, a planter's way of life. Jefferson inclined toward the University of Virginia, but Joseph persuaded him to give the Academy a try. It was in the tradition for the younger sons of prominent southern families to go there; if at the end of a year he found he did not like it he could



transfer. So Davis attended West Point, and found he liked it.

Up to now he had shown no special inclination to study. Alert and affectionate, he was of mischievous disposition, enjoyed a practical joke, and sought the admiration of his fellows rather more than the esteem of his professors. Now at the Academy he continued along this course, learning something of tavern life in the process. "O Benny Haven's, O!" he sang, linking arms and clinking tankards. He found he liked the military comradeship, the thought of unrequited death on lonely, far-off battlefields:

*"To our comrades who have fallen, one cup before we go;*

*They poured their life-blood freely out pro bono publico.*

*No marble points the stranger to where they rest below;*

*They lie neglected—far away from Benny Haven's, O!"*

Brought before a court martial for out-of-bounds drinking of "spirituous liquors," he made the defense of a strict constructionist: 1) visiting Benny Haven's was not *officially* prohibited in the regulations, and 2) malt liquors were not "spirituous" in the first place. The defense was successful; he was not dismissed, and he emerged from the scrape a stricter constructionist than ever. He also got to know his fellow cadets. Leonidas Polk was his roommate; Joseph E. Johnston was said to have been his opponent in a fist fight over a girl; along with others, he admired the open manliness of Albert Sidney Johnston, the high-born rectitude of Robert E. Lee.

Davis himself was admired, even liked. Witnesses spoke of his well-shaped head, his self-esteem, his determination and personal mastery. A "florid young fellow," he had "beautiful blue eyes, graceful figure." In his studies he did less well, receiving his lowest marks in mathematics and deportment, his highest in rhetoric and moral philosophy, including constitutional law. But the high could not pull up the lows. He stood well below the middle of his class, still a private at the close of his senior year, and graduated in 1828, twenty-third in a class of thirty-four.

As a second lieutenant, U.S. Army, he now began a seven-year adventure, serving in Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, where he learned to fight Indians, build forts, scout, and lead a simple social existence. He had liked West Point; he found he liked this even better. Soon he proved himself a superior junior officer, quick-witted and resourceful—as when once with a few men he was chased by a band of Indians after scalps; both parties being in canoes, he improvised a sail and drew away. In winter of deep snow he came down with pneumonia, and though he won that fight as well, his susceptibility to colds and neuralgia dated from then. He was promoted to first lieutenant within four years, and when Black Hawk was captured in 1832, Davis was appointed by his colonel, Zachary Taylor, to escort the prisoner to Jefferson Barracks.

Thus Colonel Taylor, called "Old Rough and Ready," showed his approval of Davis as a soldier. But as a son-in-law, it developed, he wanted no part of him. The lieutenant had met the colonel's daughter, sixteen-year-old Knox Taylor, brown-haired and blue-eyed like himself, though later the color of her own eyes would deepen to gray. Love came quickly, and his letters to her show a man unseen before after. "By my dreams I have been lately almost crazed, for they were of you," he wrote to her, and also thus: "Kind, dear letter; I have kissed it often and often, and it has driven away mad notions from my brain." The girl accepted his suit, but the father did not; Taylor wanted no soldier son-in-law, apparently especially not this one. Therefore Davis, who had spent the past seven years as a man of action, proposed to challenge the colonel to a duel. Dissuaded from this, he remained a man of action.

still. He resigned his commission, went straight to Louisville, and married the girl. The wedding was held at the home of an aunt she was visiting. "After the service everybody cried but Davis," a witness remarked, adding that they "thought this most peculiar."

As it turned out, he was reserving his tears. The young couple did not wait to attempt reconciliation with her father; perhaps they depended on time to accomplish this. Instead they took steamboat south to Davis Bend, Mississippi, below Vicksburg, where Joseph Davis, the guardian elder brother, had prospered on a plantation called The Hurricane. He presented them with an adjoining 80-acre place and fourteen slaves on credit. Davis put in a cotton crop, but before the harvest time came round they were both down with fever. They were confined to separate rooms, each too sick to be told of the other's condition, though Davis managed to make it to the door of his bride's room in time to see her die. She had been a wife not quite three months, and as she died she sang snatches of "Fair Bells," a favorite air; she had had it from her mother. Now those tears which he had not shed at the wedding came to scald his eyes. He was too sick to attend the funeral; the doctor believed he would not be long behind her.

The doctor was wrong, though Davis never lost the drawn, gaunt look of a fever convalescent. He returned to the plantation; then, finding it too crowded with recent memories, left for Cuba, thought to be a fine climate and landscape for restoring broken hearts. The sea bathing at least did his health much good, and he returned by way of New York and Washington, renewing acquaintances with old friends now on the rise and gaining some notion of how much he had missed on the frontier. Then he came home to Mississippi. He would be a planter and, at last, a student.

He found a ready tutor awaiting him. Joseph Davis had got a law degree in Kentucky, had set up a practice in Natchez, and, prospering, had bought the land which in that section practically amounted to a patent of nobility. By now, in his middle fifties, he was the wealthiest planter in the state, the "leading philosopher"—whatever that meant—and the possessor of the finest library, which he gladly made available to his idolized younger brother. Davis soon had the Constitution by heart and went deeply into *Elliot's Debates*, theories of government as argued by the framers. He read John Locke and Adam Smith, *The Federalist* and the works of Thomas Jefferson. Shakespeare and Swift lent him what an orator might need of cadenced beauty and invective; Byron and Scott were there at hand along with the best English magazines and the leading American newspapers. He read them all, and discussed them with his brother.

Also there was the plantation; Brierfield, he called it. Here too he worked and learned, making certain innovations in the labor system. The overseer was a Negro, James Pemberton. No slave was ever punished except after a formal trial by an all-Negro jury, Davis only reserving the right to temper the severity of the judgment. James was always James, never Jim; "It is disrespect to give a nickname," Davis said, and the overseer repaid him with frankness, loyalty, and efficiency. Once when something went amiss and the master asked him why, James replied: "I rather think, sir, through my neglect."

Davis gained all this from his decade of seclusion and study; but he gained something else as well. Up to now, his four years at West Point, brief and interrupted as they were, had been the longest period he had spent at any one place in his life. His school years had been various indeed, with instructors ranging from log-cabin teachers to Catholic priests and New England scholars. When a Virginian or a Carolinian spoke of his "country," he meant Virginia or Carolina. It was not so with Davis. Tennessee and Kentucky were as familiar to him as Mississippi; the whole South, as a region formed his background; he was thirty before he knew a real home in any real sense of the word. Now at last he had this, too, though still with a feeling of being somewhat apart. Like his brother Joseph

and his father before him, he was a Democrat, and while this was true of the majority of the people of his state, it was by no means true of the majority in his class, who were Federalists or Whigs.

Then history intervened for him and solved this problem too. Previously the cotton capitalists had thought their interests coincided with the interests of capitalists in general. Now anti-slavery and protectionist agitation was beginning to teach them otherwise. In 1844, the year when Davis emerged from seclusion, the upheaval was accomplished. Repudiating Jefferson and Jackson, the Democrats went over to the Whigs, who came to meet them, creating what Calhoun had been after from the start: a solid South. Davis caught the movement at its outset.

Before that, however, in the previous December, his brother produced one more item from the hoard of plenty. He had a lawyer friend, W. B. Howell of Natchez, son of an eight-term governor of New Jersey. Howell had married a Kempe of Virginia and moved south to cotton country. Joseph Davis was an intimate of their house; their first son was named for him, and their seventeen-year-old daughter Varina called him Uncle Joe. Now he wrote to the girl's parents, inviting her to visit The Hurricane. She arrived by steamboat during the Christmas season, having just completed an education in the classics. She did not stay at The Hurricane; she stayed at his sister's plantation, fourteen miles away. Presently a horseman arrived with a message. He dismounted to give it to her, lingered briefly, then excused himself and rode off to a political meeting in Vicksburg. That night Varina wrote to her mother, giving her first impression of the horseman.

Today Uncle Joe sent, by his younger brother (did you know he had one?), an urgent invitation to me to go at once to The Hurricane. I do not know whether this Mr Jefferson Davis is young or old. He looks both at times; but I believe he is old, for from what I hear he is only two years younger than you are. He impresses me as a remarkable kind of man, but of uncertain temper and has a way of taking for granted that everybody agrees with him when he expresses an opinion, which offends me; yet he is most agreeable and has a peculiarly sweet voice and a winning manner of asserting himself. The fact is, he is the kind of person you should expect to rescue one from a mad dog at any risk, but to insist upon a stoical indifference to the fright afterward. I do not think I shall ever like him as I do his brother Joe. Would you believe it, he is refined and cultivated, and yet he is a Democrat!

This last was the principal difficulty between them. Varina was a Natchez girl, which meant not only that her background was Federalist, but also that she had led a life of gaiety quite unlike the daily round in the malarial bottoms of Davis Bend. The Christmas season was a merry one, however, and Joseph proved an excellent matchmaker, although a rather heavy-handed one. "By Jove, she is as beautiful as Venus!" he told his brother, adding: "As well as good looks, she has a mind that will fit her for any sphere that the man to whom she is married will feel proud to reach." Jefferson agreed, admiring the milk-pale skin, the raven hair, the generous mouth, the slender waist. "She is beautiful and she has a fine mind," he admitted, with some caution at the outset.

In the evenings there were readings from historians and orators, and the brothers marveled at the ease with which the girl pronounced and translated the Latin phrases and quotations that studded the texts. The conquest was nearly complete; there remained only the political difference. In the course of these discussions Varina wore a cameo brooch with a Whig device carved into the stone, a watchdog crouched by a strongbox. Then one day she appeared without it, and Davis knew he had won.

He left The Hurricane in late January, engaged. In February of the following year, 1845, they were married. Davis was thirty-six, Varina half that. They went to New Orleans on the wedding tour, enjoyed a fashionable Creole interlude, and returned after a few weeks to Brierfield.

The house they moved into was a one-story frame twin-wing structure; Davis had planned and built

it himself, with the help of James Pemberton. It had charm, but he and his young wife had little time to enjoy it. By then he had emerged from his shell in more ways than one. In 1843 he had run for the state legislature against Sergeant S. Prentiss, famous as an orator, a Whig in an overwhelmingly Whig district. Davis was defeated, though with credit and a growing reputation. The following year, taking time off from courtship, he stumped the state as an elector for James K. Polk. In the year of his marriage, Whigs and Democrats having coalesced, he was elected to Congress as representative-at-large. In Washington, his first act was to introduce a resolution that federal troops be withdrawn from federal forts, their posts to be taken by state recruits. It died in committee, and his congressional career was ended by the outbreak of the Mexican War.

Davis resigned his seat and came home to head a volunteer regiment, the Mississippi Rifles. Under the strict discipline of their West Point colonel, who saw to it that they were armed with a new model rifle, they were the crack outfit of Zachary Taylor's army, fighting bravely at Monterey and saving the day at Buena Vista, where Davis formed them in a V that broke the back of a Mexican cavalry charge and won the battle. He was wounded in the foot, came home on crutches, and at victory banquets in New Orleans and elsewhere heard himself proclaimed a military genius and the hero of the South. Hunched upon his crutches, he responded to such toasts with dignified modesty. Basically his outlook was unchanged. When Polk sent him a commission as a brigadier general of volunteers, Davis returned it promptly, remarking that the President had no authority to make such an appointment, the power inhering in the states alone. Perhaps all these honors were somewhat anticlimactic anyhow, coming as they did after the words General Taylor was supposed to have spoken to him at Buena Vista: "My daughter, sir, was a better judge of men than I was."

Honors fell thickly upon him now. Within sixty days the governor appointed him to the U.S. Senate. At a private banquet tendered before he left, he stood and heard the toasts go round: "Colonel Jeff Davis, the Game Cock of the South!" "Jeff Davis, the President of the Southern Confederacy!" Davis stood there, allowing no change of expression, no flush of emotion on his face. He took this stiffness and coldness up to Washington and onto the floor of the Senate.

He would not unbend; he would engage in no log-rolling. In a cloakroom exchange, when he stated his case supporting a bill for removing obstructions from the river down near Vicksburg, another senator, who had his pet project too, interrupted to ask, "Will you vote for the Lake appropriations?" Davis responded: "Sir, I make no terms. I accept no compromises. If when I ask for an appropriation the object shall be shown to be proper and the expenditure constitutional, I defy the gentleman, for his conscience' sake, to vote against it. If it shall appear to him otherwise, then I expect his opposition and only ask that it shall be directly, fairly, and openly exerted. The case shall be presented on its single merit; on that I wish to stand or fall. I feel, sir, that I am incapable of sectional distinction upon such subjects. I abhor and reject all interested combinations." He would hammer thus at what he thought was wrong, and continue to hammer, icy cold and in measured terms, long after the opposition had been demolished, without considering the thoughts of the other man or the chance that he might be useful to him someday.

He was perhaps the best informed, probably the best educated, and certainly the most intellectual man in the Senate. Yet he too had to take his knocks. Supporting an army pay-increase bill, he remarked in passing that "a common blacksmith or tailor" could not be hired as a military engineer whereupon Andrew Johnson of Tennessee—formerly a tailor—rose from his desk shouting that "a illegitimate, swaggering, bastard, scrub aristocracy" took much credit to itself, yet in fact had "neither talents nor information." Hot words in a Washington boarding house led to a fist fight between Davis and Henry S. Foote, his fellow senator from Mississippi. An Illinois congressman, W. H. Bissell, said

in a speech that Davis' command had been a mile and a half from the blaze of battle at Buena Vista. Davis sent an immediate challenge, and Bissell, having the choice of weapons, named muskets loaded with ball and shot at fifteen paces, then went home, wrote his will, and said he would be ready in the morning. Friends intervening, Bissell explained that he had been referring to another quarter of the field and had not meant to question Davis' personal bravery anyhow; the duel was canceled. Davis made enemies in high places, as for example when he claimed that General Winfield Scott had overcharged \$300 in mileage expenses. Scott later delivered himself of a judgment as to Davis: "He is not a cheap Judas. I do not think he would have sold the Saviour for thirty shillings. But for the successorship to Pontius Pilate he would have betrayed Christ and the Apostles and the whole Christian church." Sam Houston of Texas, speaking more briefly, declared that Davis was "ambitious as Lucifer and cold as a lizard."

Out of the rough-and-tumble of debate and acrimony, a more or less accepted part of political life at the time, Davis was winning a position as a leader in the Senate. Successor to Calhoun, he had become the spokesman for southern nationalism, which in those days meant not independence but domination from within the Union. This movement had been given impetus by the Mexican War. Up till then the future of the country pointed north and west, but now the needle trembled and suddenly swung south. The treaty signed at Guadalupe Hidalgo brought into the Union a new southwestern domain seemingly ripe for slavery and the southern way of life: not only Texas down to the Rio Grande, the original strip of contention, but also the vast sun-cooked area that was to become Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, part of Colorado, and California with its new-found gold. Here was room for expansion indeed, with more to follow; for the nationalists looked forward to taking what was left of Mexico, all of Central America south to Panama, and Yucatan and Cuba by annexation. Yet the North, so recently having learned the comfort of the saddle, had no intention of yielding the reins. The South would have to fight for this; and this the South was prepared to do, using States Rights for a spear and the Constitution for a shield. Jefferson Davis, who had formed his troops in a V at Buena Vista and continued the fight with a boot full of blood, took a position, now as then, at the apex of the wedge.

He lost the fight, and lost it quickly—betrayed, as he thought, from within his ranks. The North opposed this dream of southern expansion by opposing the extension of slavery, without which the new southwestern territory would be anything but southern. Attracted by the hope of so much gain and goaded by the fear of such a loss, Davis and his cohorts adopted more drastic actions, including threats of secession. To give substance to this threat, he called the Nashville Convention of June 1850 and in conjunction with Albert Gallatin Brown of Mississippi, William Lowndes Yancey of Alabama, and Robert Barnwell Rhett of South Carolina, informed the North quite plainly that unless slavery was extended to the territories, the South would leave the Union. It was at this point that Davis was "betrayed," meaning that he discovered that he had outrun his constituents. Henry Clay proposed the Compromise, supported by Daniel Webster, and both houses of Congress gladly accepted it. California came in as a free state and the question of slavery was left to be settled by the various other territories at the time when they should apply for admission into the Union.

What was worse from Davis' point of view, the voters seemed to approve. All over the nation, even in Mississippi, there was rejoicing that disunion and war had been avoided. Davis could scarcely believe it; he must test it at the polls. So he resigned his seat in the Senate and went home to run for governor against Henry S. Foote, the senator with whom he had exchanged first tart remarks and finally blows. Now the issue was clearly drawn, for his opponent was a Unionist Whig of Natchez and had voted consistently against Davis, from the beginning down to the Compromise itself; the voters could make a clear-cut choice before all the world. This they did—repudiating Davis.

It was bad enough to be vanquished as the champion of secession, but to receive defeat at the hands of a man he detested as much as he detested Foote was gall and wormwood. At forty-three, in the hour of his glory and at the height of his prime, he was destroyed; or so he thought. At any rate he was through. He came home to Brierfield to plant cotton.

Then history intervened again, as history always seemed to do for him. This time the muse took the form of Franklin Pierce, who in organizing a cabinet reached down from New Hampshire, all the way to Mississippi, and chose Jefferson Davis as his Secretary of War. They had been fellow officers in Mexico, friends in Congress, and shared a dislike of abolitionists. Whatever his reasons, Pierce chose well. Davis made perhaps the best War Secretary the country ever had, and though it included such capable men as William L. Marcy of New York and Caleb Cushing of Massachusetts, he dominated the cabinet in a time of strain and doubt.

Yet the man who returned to public life in 1853 was somewhat different from the man who had left it in 1851 at the behest of the voters. Rather chastened—though he kept his southern nationalism and clung to the spear of States Rights, the shield of the Constitution—he left the fire-eaters Yancey and Rhett behind him. He was no longer the impetuous champion of secession; he believed now that whatever was to be gained might best be accomplished within the Union. He strengthened the army, renovated the Military Academy, and came out strong for un-Jeffersonian internal improvements, including a Pacific Railway along a southern route through Memphis or Vicksburg, to be financed by a hundred-million-dollar federal appropriation. The Gadsden Purchase was a Davis project, ten million paid for a strip of Mexican soil necessary for the railroad right-of-way. Nor was his old imperialism dead. He still had designs on what was left of Mexico and on Central America, and he shocked the diplomats of Europe with a proclamation of his government's intention to annex Cuba. Above all, he was for the unlimited extension of slavery, with a revival of the slave trade if need be.

Returned to the Senate in 1857, he continued to work along these lines, once more a southern champion, not as a secessionist, but as a believer that the destiny of the nation pointed south. It was a stormy time, and much of the bitterness between the sections came to a head on the floor of the Senate, where northern invective and southern arrogance necessarily met. Here Texas senator Louis Wigfall, a duelist of note, would sneer at his northern colleagues as he told them, "The difficulty between you and us, gentlemen, is that you will not send the right sort of people here. Why will you not send either Christians or gentlemen?" Here, too, the anti-slavery Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner had his head broken by Congressman Preston Brooks of South Carolina, who, taking exception to remarks Sumner had made on the floor of the Senate regarding a kinsman, caned him while he sat at his desk. Brooks explained that he attacked him sitting because, Sumner being the larger man, he would have had to shoot him if he had risen, and he did not want to kill him, only maim him. Sumner lay bleeding in the aisle among the gutta-percha fragments of the cane, and his enemies stood by and watched him bleed. Southern sympathizers sent Brooks walking sticks by the dozen, recommending their use on other abolitionists, and through the years of Sumner's convalescence Massachusetts let his desk stand empty as a reproach to southern hotheads, though these were in fact more likely to see the vacant seat as a warning to men like Sumner.

During this three-year furor, which led in the end to the disintegration of the Democratic Party and the resultant election of a Republican President, Davis remained as inflexible as ever. But his arguments now did not progress toward secession. They ended instead against a hard brick wall. He did not even claim to know the answers beyond debate. In 1860, speaking in Boston's Faneuil Hall while he and Mrs Davis were up there vacationing for his health—he was a chronic dyspeptic by now

racked by neuralgia through sleepless nights and losing the sight of one eye—he stated his position to slavery and southern nationalism, but announced that he remained opposed to secession; he would not take the logical next step. He was much admired by the people of Massachusetts, many whom despised the abolitionists as much as he did; but the people of Mississippi hardly knew what to make of him. “Davis is at sea,” they said.

Then he looked back, and saw that instead of outrunning his constituents, this time he had let them outrun him. He hurried South, made his harvest-home-of-death speech on the eve of Lincoln’s election, and returned to Washington, at last reconverted to secession. South Carolina left the Union first, then Mississippi and the others, and opinion no longer mattered. As he said in his farewell, even if he had opposed his state’s action, he still would have considered himself “bound.”

Having spoken his adieu, he left the crowded chamber and, head lowered, went out into the street. That night Mrs Davis heard him pacing the floor. “May God have us in His holy keeping,” she heard him say over and over as he paced, “and grant that before it is too late, peaceful councils may prevail.”

Such was Davis’ way of saying farewell to his colleagues, speaking out of sadness and regret. It was not the way of others: Robert Toombs of Georgia, for example, whose state had seceded two days before Davis spoke. Two days later Toombs delivered his farewell. “The Union, sir, is dissolved,” he told the Senate. A large, slack-mouthed man, he tossed his head in shaggy defiance as he spoke. “You see the glittering bayonet, and you hear the tramp of armed men from yon Capitol to the Rio Grande. It is a sight that gladdens the eye and cheers the hearts of other men ready to second them.” In case there were those of the North who would maintain the Union by force: “Come and do it!” Toombs cried. “Georgia is on the war path! We are as ready to fight now as we ever shall be. Treason? Bah!” And with that he stalked out of the chamber, walked up to the Treasury, and demanded his salary due to date, plus mileage back to Georgia.

Thus Toombs. But Davis, having sent his wife home with their three children—Margaret aged six, Jeff three, and the year-old baby named for the guardian elder brother Joseph at Davis Bend—lingered in Washington another week, ill and confined to his bed for most of the time, still hoping he might be arrested as a traitor so as to test his claims in the federal courts, then took the train for Jackson, where Governor J. J. Pettus met him with a commission as major general of volunteers. It was the job Davis wanted. He believed there would be war, and he advised the governor to push the procurement of arms.

“The limit of our purchases should be our power to pay,” he said. “We shall need all and many more than we can get.”

“General,” the governor protested, “you overrate the risk.”

“I only wish I did,” Davis said.

Awaiting the raising of his army, he went to Brierfield. In Alabama, now in early February, a convention was founding a Southern Confederacy, electing political leaders and formulating a new government. He was content, however, to leave such matters to those who were there. He considered his highest talents to be military and he had the position he wanted, commander of the Mississippi army, with advancement to come along with glory when the issue swung to war.

Then history beckoned again, assuming another of her guises. February 10; he and Mrs Davis were out in the garden, cutting a rose bush in the early blue spring weather, when a messenger approached with a telegram in his hand. Davis read it. In that moment of painful silence he seemed stricken; his face took on a look of calamity. Then he read the message to his wife. It was headed “Montgomery, Alabama,” and dated the day before.

Sir:

We are directed to inform you that you are this day unanimously elected President of the Provisional Government of the Confederate States of America, and to request you to come to Montgomery immediately. We send also a special messenger. Do not wait for him.

R. Toombs,  
R. Barnwell Rhett

He spoke of it, Mrs Davis said, "as a man might speak of a sentence of death." Yet he wasted no time. He packed and left next day.

The train made many stops along the line and the people were out to meet him, in sunlight and by the glare of torches. They wanted a look at his face, the thin lips and determined jaw, the hollow cheeks with their jutting bones, the long skull behind the aquiline nose; "a wizard physiognomy," one called it. He brought forth cheers with confident words, but he had something else to say as well—something no one had told them before. He advised them to prepare for the long war that lay ahead. They did not believe him, apparently. Or if they did, they went on cheering anyhow.

He reached Montgomery Sunday night, February 17, and was driven from the station in a carriage down the long torch-lit avenue to the old Exchange Hotel. The crowd followed through streets that had been decked as for a fair; they flowed until they were packed in a mass about the gallery of the hotel in time to see Davis dismount from the carriage and climb the steps; they cheered as he turned and looked at them. Then suddenly they fell silent. William Lowndes Yancey, short and rather seedy looking alongside the erect and well-groomed Davis, had raised one hand. They cheered again when he brought it down, gesturing toward the tall man beside him, and said in a voice that rang above the expectant, torch-paled faces of the crowd: "The man and the hour have met."

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The day that Davis received the summons in the rose garden was Abraham Lincoln's last full day in Springfield, Illinois. He would be leaving tomorrow for Washington and his inauguration, the same day that Davis left for Montgomery and his. During the three months since the election, Springfield had changed from a sleepy, fairly typical western county seat and capital into a bustling, cadging hive of politicians, office seekers, reporters, committees representing "folks back home," and the plain downright curious with time on their hands, many of whom had come for no other reason than to breathe the same air with a man who had his name in all the papers. Some were lodged in railway cars on sidings; boarding houses were feeding double shifts.

All of these people wanted a look at Lincoln, and most of them wanted interviews, which they got. "I can't sleep nights," he was saying. His fingers throbbed from shaking hands and his face ached from smiling. He had leased the two-story family residence, sold the cow and the horse and buggy and left the dog to be cared for by a neighbor; he and his wife and children were staying now at the Chenery House, where the President-elect himself had roped their trunks and addressed them to "Lincoln, The White House, Washington D.C." He was by nature a friendly man but his smile was becoming a grimace. "I am sick of office-holding already," he said on this final day in Illinois.

Change was predominant not only in Springfield; the Union appeared to be coming apart at the seams. Louisiana and Texas had brought the total of seceded states to seven. Banks and business firms were folding; the stock market declined and declined. James Buchanan, badly confused, was doing nothing in these last weeks of office. Having stated in his December message to Congress that while a state had no lawful right to secede, neither had the federal government any right to prevent



privately he was saying that he was the last President of the United States.

North and South, Union men looked to Lincoln, whose election had been the signal for all the trouble. They wanted words of reassurance, words of threat, anything to slow the present trend, to drift toward chaos. Yet he said nothing. When a Missouri editor asked him for a statement, something he could print to make men listen, Lincoln wrote back: "I could say nothing which I have not already said, and which is in print and accessible to the public.... I am not at liberty to shift my ground; that is out of the question. If I thought a repetition would do any good I would make it. But my judgment is that it would do positive harm. The secessionists, *per se* believing they had alarmed me, would clamor all the louder."

People hardly knew what to make of this tall, thin-chested, raw-boned man who spoke with the frontier in his voice, wore a stove-pipe hat as if to emphasize his six-foot four-inch height, and walked with a shambling western slouch, the big feet planted flat at every step, the big hands dangling from wrists that hung down out of the sleeves of his rusty tailcoat. Mr Lincoln, they called him, or Lincoln never "Abe" as in the campaign literature. The seamed, leathery face was becoming familiar: the mole on the right cheek, the high narrow forehead with the unruly, coarse black shock of hair above it, barely grizzled; the pale gray eyes set deep in bruised sockets, the broad mouth somewhat quizzical with a protruding lower lip, the pointed chin behind its recent growth of scraggly beard, the wry nose—a clown face; a sad face, some observed on closer inspection, perhaps the saddest they had ever seen. It was hard to imagine a man like this in the White House, where Madison and Van Buren had kept court. He had more or less blundered into the Republican nomination, much as his Democratic opponents had blundered into defeat in the election which had followed. It had all come about as a result of linking accidents and crises, and the people, with their accustomed championing of the underdog, the dark horse, had enjoyed it at the time. Yet now that the nation was in truth a house divided, now that war loomed, they were not so sure. Down South, men were hearing speeches that fired their blood. Here it was not so; for there was only silence from Abraham Lincoln. Congressman Horace Maynard, a Tennessee Unionist, believed he knew why. "I imagine that he keeps silence," Maynard said, "for the good and sufficient reason that he has nothing to say."

It was true that he had nothing to say at the time. He was waiting; he was drawing on one of his greatest virtues, patience. Though the Cotton South had gone out solid, the eight northernmost slave states remained loyal. Delaware and Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina, Kentucky and Tennessee, Missouri and Arkansas were banked between the hotheads, north and south, a double buffer, and though Lincoln had not received a single electoral vote from this whole area, he counted on the sound common sense of the people there. What was more—provided he did nothing to alienate the loyalty of the border states—he counted on Union sentiment in the departed states to bring them back into the family.

He had had much practice in just this kind of waiting. One of these days, while he was sitting in his office with a visitor, his son Willie came clattering in to demand a quarter. "I can't let you have a quarter," Lincoln said; "I can only spare five cents." He took five pennies from his pocket and stacked them on a corner of the desk. Willie had not asked for a nickel; he wanted a quarter. He sulked and went away, leaving the pennies on the desk. "He will be back after that in a few minutes," Lincoln told the visitor. "As soon as he finds I will give him no more, he will come and get it." They went on talking. Presently the boy returned, took the pennies from the desk, and quietly left. Patience had worked, where attempts at persuasion might have resulted in a flare-up. So with the departed states, self-interest and family ties might bring them back in time. Meanwhile Lincoln walked as softly as he could.

In this manner he had gotten through three of the four anxious months that lay between the election and inauguration, and on this final afternoon in Springfield he went down to his law office to pick up some books and papers and to say goodbye to his partner, William L. Herndon. Nine years his junior, Herndon was excitable, apt to fling off at a tangent, and Lincoln would calm him, saying, "Billy, you're too rampant." There had been times, too, when the older man had gone about collecting fees and pay the fine when his partner was about to be jailed for disorderly conduct on a spree. Now the two sat in the office, discussing business matters. Then came an awkward silence, which Lincoln broke by asking: "Billy, there's one thing I have for some time wanted you to tell me.... I want you to tell me how many times you have been drunk." Flustered, Herndon stammered, and Lincoln let it pass. That was the closest he ever came to delivering a temperance lecture.

They rose, walked downstairs, and paused on the boardwalk. Lincoln glanced up at the weathered law shingle: LINCOLN & HERNDON. "Let it hang there undisturbed," he said. "Give our clients to understand that the election of a President makes no change in the firm of Lincoln and Herndon. If I live I'm coming back some time, and then we'll go right on practicing law as if nothing ever happened." Again there was an awkward pause. Lincoln put his hand out. "Goodbye," he said, and went off down the street.

Herndon stood and watched him go, the tall, loose-jointed figure with the napless stove-pipe hat, the high-water pantaloons, the ill-fitting tailcoat bulging at the elbows from long wear. This junior partner was one of those who saw the sadness in Lincoln's face. "Melancholy dripped from him as he walked," he was to write. Herndon knew something else as well, something that had not been included in the campaign literature: "That man who thinks that Lincoln sat calmly down and gathered his robes about him, waiting for the people to call him, has a very erroneous knowledge of Lincoln. He was always calculating, and always planning ahead. His ambition was a little engine that knew no rest."

That day, as the sun went down and he returned to the Chenery House for his last sleep in Illinois, there were few who knew this side of him. There were gaps in the story that even Herndon could not fill, and other gaps that no one could fill, ever, though writers were to make him the subject of more biographies and memoirs, more brochures and poems than any other American. On the face of it the facts were simple enough, as he told a journalist who came seeking information about his boyhood years for a campaign biography: "Why, Scripps, it is a great piece of folly to attempt to make anything out of my early life. It can all be condensed into a single sentence, and that sentence you will find in Gray's *Elegy*: 'The short and simple annals of the poor.' "

He was born in the Kentucky wilderness of Daniel Boone, mid-February of 1809, in a one-room dirt-floor cabin put up that same winter by his father, Thomas Lincoln, a thick-chested man of average height, who passed on to Abraham only his coarse black hair and dark complexion. Originally from Virginia, Thomas was a wanderer like the Lincolns before him, who had come down out of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and though in early manhood he could sign his name when necessary, later he either forgot or else he stopped taking the trouble; he made his X-mark like his wife, born Nancy Hanks.

In after years when Lincoln tried to trace his ancestry he could go no further back than his father's father, also named Abraham, who had been killed from ambush by an Indian. That was on his father's side. On his mother's he discovered only that she had been born out of wedlock to Lucy Hanks who later married a man named Sparrow. Nancy died of the milksick when Abraham was nine, and her body lay in another of those one-room cabins while her husband knocked together a coffin in the yard.

They were in Indiana by then, having come to the big woods after a previous move to Knob Creek south of Louisville and beside the Cumberland Trail, along which pioneers with many children and

few livestock marched northwestward. Thomas Lincoln joined them for the move across the Ohio, and when his wife died took another the following year: Sarah Bush Johnston, a widow with three children. She was called Sally Bush Lincoln now, tall and hard-working, a welcome addition to any frontier family, especially this one, which had been without a woman for almost a year. She brought to Abraham all the love and affection she had given her own. The boy returned it, and in later years when his memory of Nancy Hanks Lincoln had paled, referred to the one who took her place as "my angel mother," saying: "All that I am I owe to my angel mother."

For one thing, she saw to it that the boy went to school. Previously he had not gone much deeper into learning than his ABC's, and only then at such times as his father felt he could spare him from his chores. Now at intervals he was able to fit in brief weeks of schooling, amounting in all to something under a year. They were "blab" schools, which meant that the pupils studied aloud at their desks and the master judged the extent of their concentration by the volume of their din. Between such periods of formal education he studied at home, ciphering on boards when he had no slate, and shaving the clean with a knife for an eraser. He developed a talent for mimicry, too, mounting a stump when out with a work gang and delivering mock orations and sermons. This earned him the laughter of the men who would break off work to watch him, but his father disapproved of such interruptions and would speak to him sharply or cuff him off the stump.

He grew tall and angular, with long muscles, so that in his early teens he could grip an ax one-handed at the end of the helve and hold it out, untrembling. Neighbors testified to his skill with the implement, one saying: "He can sink an ax deeper into wood than any man I ever saw," and another: "If you heard him felling trees in a clearing, you would say there was three men at work by the way the trees fell." However, though he did his chores, including work his father hired him out to do, he developed no real liking for manual labor. He would rather be reading what few books he got his hands on: Parson Weems's *Life of Washington*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Æsop's Fables*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Grimshaw's History of the United States*, and *The Kentucky Preceptor*. Sometimes he managed to combine the two, for in plowing he would stop at the end of a row, reading while he gave the horse a breather.

From a flatboat trip one thousand miles downriver to New Orleans, during which he learned to trim a deck and man a sweep, he returned in time for his twenty-first birthday and another family migration, from Indiana out to central Illinois, where he and a cousin hired out to split four thousand rails for their neighbors. Thus he came to manhood, a rail-splitter, wilderness-born and frontier-raised. He was of the West, the new country out beyond the old, a product of a nation fulfilling a manifest destiny. It was in his walk, in his talk and in his character, indelibly. It would be with him wherever he went, along with the knowledge that he had survived in a region where "the Lord spared the fitten and the rest He seen fitten to let die."

He had never had much fondness for his father, and now that he was legally independent he struck out on his own. The family moved once more, deeper into Illinois, but Lincoln did not go with them. He took instead another flatboat trip down to New Orleans, and then came back to another kind of life. This was prairie country, with a rich soil and a future. Lincoln got a job clerking in a New Salem store at fifteen dollars a month plus a bed to sleep in. He defeated the leader of the regional toughs in a wrestling match, and when the leader's friends pitched in, Lincoln backed against a wall and dared them to come at him one by one; whereupon they acknowledged him as their new leader.

This last was rather in line with the life he had led before, but he found something new as well. He attended the New Salem Debating Society, and though at first the charter members snickered at his looks and awkwardness, presently they were admiring the logic and conciseness of his arguments. "A

he lacked was culture,” one of them said. Lincoln took such encouragement from his success that the spring of 1832 he announced as a candidate for the state legislature.

The Black Hawk War interrupting his campaign, he enlisted and was elected captain by his fellow volunteers. Discipline was not strong among them; the new commander’s first order to one of his men brought the reply, “You go to hell.” They saw no action, and Lincoln afterwards joked about his military career, saying that all the blood he lost was to mosquitoes and all his charges were against wild-onion beds. When the company’s thirty-day enlistment expired he reënlisted for another twenty days as a private, then came home and resumed his campaign for the legislature, two weeks remaining until election day. His first political speech was made at a country auction. Twenty-three years old, he stood on a box, wearing a frayed straw hat, a calico shirt, and pantaloons held up by a single-strap suspender. As he was about to speak, a fight broke out in the crowd. Lincoln stepped down, broke up the fight, then stepped back onto the box.

“Gentlemen and fellow citizens,” he said, “I presume you all know who I am: I am humble Abraham Lincoln. I have been solicited by many friends to become a candidate for the legislature. My politics are short and sweet, like the old woman’s dance. I am in favor of a national bank. I am in favor of the internal-improvements system and a high protective tariff. These are my sentiments and political principles. If elected, I shall be thankful; if not, it will be all the same.”

Election day he ran eighth in a field of thirteen, but he received 277 of the 300 votes in the New Salem precinct.

It was probably then that Lincoln determined to run for the same office next time around. Meanwhile there was a living to earn. He could always split rails and do odd jobs. These he did, and then went into partnership in a grocery store that failed, leaving him a debt beyond a thousand dollars. “the National Debt,” he called it ruefully, and worked for years to pay it off. He became village postmaster, sometimes carrying letters in his hat, which became a habit. He studied surveying and worked a while at that. He also began the study of law, reading Blackstone and Chitty, and improved his education with borrowed books. His name was becoming more widely known; he was winning popularity by his great strength and his ability at telling funny stories, but mostly by his forceful character. Then in the spring of 1834, when another legislature race came round, he conducted an all-out full-time campaign and was elected.

With borrowed money he bought his first tailor-made suit, paying sixty dollars for it, and left for the first of his four terms in the state law-making body, learning the rough-and-tumble give-and-take of western politics. Two years later he was licensed as an attorney, and soon afterwards moved to Springfield as a partner in a law firm. He said goodbye to the manual labor he had been so good at, which he had never really liked; from now on he would work with his head, as a leader of men. His ambition became what Herndon later called “a little engine.”

Springfield was about to be declared the state capital, moved there from Vandalia largely through Lincoln’s efforts in the legislature, and here he began to acquire that culture which the New Salem intellectuals had said was “all he lacked.” The big, work-splained hands were losing their horn-hard calluses. He settled down to the law, becoming in time an excellent trial lawyer and a capable stump debater at political rallies, even against such opponents as Stephen A. Douglas, the coming little Giant. Socially, however, he was slow in getting started. About a month after his arrival he wrote in a letter: “I have been spoken to by but one woman since I’ve been here, and should not have been bothered by her, if she could have avoided it.” He was leery of the ladies, having once remarked, half-jokingly, “a woman is the only thing I am afraid of that I know will not hurt me.” Nevertheless, by the time he was

elected to his fourth term in the legislature, Lincoln was courting Mary Todd, a visitor from Lexington, Kentucky, and in early November of 1842 he married her.

It was an attraction of opposites, and as such it was stormy. At one point they broke off their engagement; she left Illinois and Lincoln had to go to Kentucky for a reconciliation before she would return to Springfield and marry him in her sister's parlor. If "culture" was what he was after, still Lincoln again had moved in the proper direction. His wife, the great-granddaughter of a Revolutionary general, had attended a private academy in Lexington, where she learned to speak French, read music after a fashion, paint on china, and dance the sedate figures of the time. At twenty-four she was impulsive and vivacious, short and rather plump, looking especially so alongside her long leaved husband, who was thirty-three. Lincoln seemed to take it calmly enough. Five days after the wedding he wrote to a lawyer friend: "Nothing new here, except my marrying, which to me is matter of profound wonder."

Their first child, Robert Todd, called Bob, was born the following year. Three others came in the course of the next decade, all sons: Edward and William and Thomas, called Eddy, Willie, Tad. Eddy died before he was five, and Tad had a cleft palate; he spoke with a lisp. The Lincolns lived a year in rented rooms, then moved into the \$1500 white frame house which remained their home. They took their place in Springfield society, and Lincoln worked hard at law, riding the Eighth Judicial Circuit in all kinds of weather, a clean shirt and a change of underwear in his saddlebag, along with books and papers and a yellow flannel nightshirt. Fees averaged about five dollars a case, sometimes paid in groceries, which he was glad to get, since the cost of the house represented something beyond one year's total earnings.

Home life taught him patience, for his wife was high-strung as well as high-born. He called her Mother and met her fits of temper with forbearance, which must have been the last thing she wanted at the time. When her temper got too hot he would walk off to his office and stay until it cooled. Accustomed to Negro house slaves in Kentucky, Mary Lincoln could not get along with Illinois hired girls, who were inclined to answer back. Lincoln did what he could here too, slipping the girls an extra weekly dollar for compensation. Once after a particularly bitter scene between mistress and maid when Mrs Lincoln had left the room he patted the girl on the shoulder and gave her the same advice he had given himself: "Stay with her, Maria. Stay with her."

His law practice grew; he felt prepared to grow in other directions. Having completed his fourth term in the state legislature, he was ready to move on up the political ladder. He wrote to Whig associates in the district, "Now if you should hear anyone say that Lincoln don't want to go to Congress, I wish you as a personal friend of mine would tell him you have reason to believe he is mistaken. The truth is, I would like to go very much." In the backstage party scramble, however, he lost the nomination in 1842 and again in 1844. It was 1847 before he got to Congress. From a back row on the Whig side of the House he came to know the voices and faces of men he would know better, Ashmun of Massachusetts, Rhett of South Carolina, Smith of Indiana, Toombs and Stephens of Georgia, while a visit to the Senate would show him the elder statesmen Webster and Calhoun, along with newer men of note, such as Cameron of Pennsylvania and Davis of Mississippi.

The Mexican War had ended by then, and though Lincoln voted for whatever army supply bill came before the House, like most Whigs he attacked the motives behind the war, which now was being spoken of, by northern Whigs at least, as "infamous and wicked," an imperialist attempt to extend the slavery realm. This got him into trouble back home, where the Democratic papers began calling him a latter-day Benedict Arnold and the people read and noted all he did as a slur against the volunteers of his state. When Congress convened for his second session, Lincoln was the only Whig from Illinois.

was a hectic session anyhow, with tempers flaring over the question of slavery in the territories. He came home with no chance for reelection, and did not try. He gave up politics, refusing even a spoils offer of the governorship of Oregon Territory, and returned to the practice of law, once more riding the circuit. Disheartened, he paused now to restore his soul through work and meditation.

Though he did not believe at the outset that it would necessarily ever reach an end—indeed, he believed it would not; otherwise it could never have done for him what it did—this five-year “retreat” coming as it did between his fortieth and his forty-fifth years, 1849 to 1854, was his interlude of greatest growth. Like many, perhaps most, men of genius, Lincoln developed late.

It was a time for study, a time for self-improvement. He went back and drilled his way through the first six books of Euclid, as an exercise to discipline his mind. Not politics but the law was his main interest now. Riding the circuit he talked less and listened more. Together with a new understanding and a deeper reading of Shakespeare and the Bible, this brought him a profounder faith in people, including those who had rejected him and repudiated what he had to offer as a leader. Here, too, he was learning. This was the period in which he was reported to have said, “You can fool some of the people all the time, and all the people some of the time, but you can’t fool all the people all the *time*.”

Nonparticipation in public affairs did not mean a loss of interest in them. Lincoln read the papers more carefully now than he had ever done before, learning from them of the deaths of Calhoun, Clay, and Webster, whose passing marked the passing of an era. When the 1850 Compromise—as he and most men believed, including Clay who engineered it shortly before his death—settled the differences that had brought turmoil to the nation and fist fights to the floors of Congress while Lincoln himself was there, he breathed easier. But not for long. The conflict soon was heading up again. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* came from the presses in a stream; southern nationalists were announcing plans for the annexation of Cuba; the case of the slave Dred Scott, suing for his freedom, moved by legal osmosis through the courts; the Whigs seemed lost and the Democrats were splitting. Then Lincoln’s old stump opponent, Stephen A. Douglas, who was four years younger than Lincoln but who had suffered no setback in political advancement, filling now his second term in the Senate, brought the crisis to a head.

Scarcely taller than Napoleon, but with all that monarch’s driving ambition and belief in a private star, Douglas moved to repeal that part of the Missouri Compromise which served to restrict the extension of slavery. This came as a result of his championing a northern route for the proposed Pacific railway. A southern route was also proposed and Douglas sought to effect a swap, reporting a bill for the organization of two new territories, Kansas and Nebraska, with the provision that the people there should determine for themselves as to the admission or exclusion of slavery, despite the fact that both areas lay well north of the 36°30’ line drawn by the Compromise, which had guaranteed that the institution would be kept forever south of there. The Southerners were glad to abandon the New Mexico route for such a gain, provided the repeal was made not only implicit but explicit in the bill. Douglas was somewhat shocked (he brought a certain naivety to even his deepest plots) but soon agreed, and Secretary of War Jefferson Davis persuaded Franklin Pierce to make the bill an Administration issue. “Popular sovereignty,” Douglas called it; “Squatter sovereignty,” his opponents considered a better name. “It will raise a hell of a storm,” Douglas predicted. It did indeed, though the Democrats managed to ram it through by late May of 1854, preparing the ground for Bleeding Kansas and the birth of the Republican Party that same year.

Another effect of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill was that it brought Lincoln out of retirement. It had raised even more of a storm than Douglas predicted, and not only in Congress. For when the senate

came home to Illinois he saw through the train window his effigy being burned in courthouse square and when he came to explain his case before eight thousand people in Chicago, they jeered him off the rostrum. He left, shaking his fist in their faces, and set out to stump the state with a speech that confounded opposition orators and won back many of the voters. Then in early October he came to Springfield, packing the hall of the House of Representatives. After the speech—which had been successful here as elsewhere in turning the jeers to cheers—the crowd filed out through the lobby and saw Abraham Lincoln standing on the staircase, announcing that he would reply to Douglas the following day and inviting the senator to be present, to answer if he cared.

Next day they were there, close-packed as yesterday; Douglas had a front-row seat. It was hot and Lincoln spoke in shirt sleeves, wearing no collar or tie. His voice was shrill as he began, though presently it settled to lower tones, interrupted from time to time by crackles and thunders of applause. Wet with sweat, his shirt clung to his shoulders and big arms. He had written his speech out beforehand, clarifying in his own mind his position as to slavery, which he saw as the nub of the issue—much to the discomfort of Douglas, who wanted to talk about “popular sovereignty,” keeping the issue one of self-government, whereas Lincoln insisted on going beyond, making slavery the main question. Emerging from his long retirement, having restored his soul, he was asking himself and all men certain questions. And now the Lincoln music began to sound.

“The doctrine of self-government is right, absolutely and eternally right; but it has no just application, as here attempted. Or perhaps I should rather say that whether it has such just application depends upon whether a Negro is not or is a man. If he is not a man, why in that case he who is a man may, as a matter of self-government, do just as he pleases with him. But if the Negro is a man, is it not to that extent a total destruction of self-government to say that he too shall not govern himself? When the white man governs himself, that is self-government; but when he governs himself and also governs another man, that is more than self-government; that is despotism. If the Negro is a man, why then no ancient faith teaches me that ‘all men are created equal,’ and that there can be no moral right in connection with one man’s making a slave of another.”

He believed that it was a moral wrong; he had not come to believe that it was a legal wrong, though he believed that too would be clarified in time. The words of his mouth came like meditations from his heart: “Slavery is founded in the selfishness of man’s nature, opposition to it in his love of justice. These principles are an eternal antagonism, and when brought into collision so fiercely as slavery extension brings them, shocks and throes and convulsions must ceaselessly follow. Repeal the Missouri Compromise, repeal all compromises; repeal the Declaration of Independence, repeal all past history—you still cannot repeal human nature. It still will be the abundance of man’s heart that slavery extension is wrong, and out of the abundance of his heart his mouth will continue to speak.”

This, in part, was the speech that caused his name to be recognized throughout the Northwest though personally he was still but little known outside his state. He repeated it twelve days later in Peoria, where shorthand reporters took it down for their papers, and continued to speak in central Illinois and in Chicago. Winning reelection to the legislature, he presently had a chance at a seat in the U.S. Senate. His hopes were high and he resigned from the legislature to be eligible, but at the last minute he had to throw his votes to an anti-Nebraska Democrat to defeat the opposition.

Again he had failed, and again he regretted failing. Yet this time he was not despondent. He kept working and waiting. His law practice boomed; he earned a five-thousand-dollar fee on a railroad case, and was retained to assist a high-powered group of big-city lawyers on a patents case in Cincinnati, but when they saw him come to town, wearing his usual rusty clothes and carrying a bald-headed blue cotton umbrella, they would scarcely speak to him. One of the attorneys, Edwin M

Stanton of Pittsburgh, was downright rude; “Where did that long-armed creature come from?” asked within earshot. Lincoln went his way, taking no apparent umbrage.

Politically he was wary, too, writing to a friend: “Just now I fear to do anything, lest I do wrong. He had good cause for fear, and so had all men through this time of “shocks and throes and convulsions.” Popular sovereignty was being tested in Kansas in a manner Douglas had not foreseen. Missouri border ruffians and hired abolitionist gunmen were cutting each other’s throats for votes in the coming referendum; the Mormons were resisting federal authority in the West, and while a ruinous financial panic gripped the East, the Know-Nothing Party was sweeping New England with anti-foreigner, anti-Catholic appeals. The Whigs had foundered, the Democrats had split on all those rocks. Like many men just now, Lincoln hardly knew where he stood along party lines.

“I think I am a Whig,” he wrote, “but others say there are no Whigs, and that I am an Abolitionist. . . . I am not a Know-Nothing. That is certain. How could I be? How can anyone who abhors the oppression of Negroes be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneration appears to me to be pretty rapid.”

He was waiting and looking. And then he found the answer.

It was 1856, a presidential election year. Out of the Nebraska crisis, two years before, the Republican Party had been born, a coalition of foundered Whigs and disaffected northern Democrats, largely abolitionist at the core. They made overtures to Lincoln but he dodged them at the time, not wanting a Radical tag attached to his name. Now, however, seeking to unify the anti-Nebraska elements in Illinois, he came to meet them. As a delegate to the state convention he caught fire and made what may have been the greatest speech of his career, though no one would ever really know since the heat of his words seemed to burn them from men’s memory, and in that conglomerate mass of gaping, howling old-line Whigs and bolted Democrats, Know-Nothings, Free Soilers and Abolitionists, even the shorthand reporters sat enthralled, forgetting to use their pencils. From now on he was a Republican; he would take his chances with the Radical tag.

At the national convention in Philadelphia he received 110 votes on the first ballot for the vice-presidential nomination, yielding them on the second to a New Jersey running mate for John C. Frémont of California. Lincoln had not favored Frémont, but he worked hard for him in the campaign that saw the election of the Democratic nominee James Buchanan, an elderly bachelor whose main advantage lay in the fact that he was the least controversial candidate, having been out of the country as Minister to England during the trying past three years. The Republicans were by no means dispirited at running second. They sniffed victory down the wind, in the race four years from now—provided only that the turmoil and sectional antagonism should continue, which seemed likely.

At this point the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision which appeared to cut the ground from under all their feet. The test case of the slave Dred Scott, suing for freedom on a plea that his master had taken him into a territory where slavery was forbidden by the Missouri Compromise, had at last reached the high court. In filing the majority opinion, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney dismissed Scott’s lawyer’s claim. A Negro, he said, was not a citizen of the United States, and therefore had no right to sue in a federal court. This was enough to enrage the Abolitionists, who secretly had sponsored the suit. But Taney went even further. The Missouri Compromise itself was void, he declared; Congress had no power over territories except to prepare for their admission to the Union; slaves being private property, Congress had no right to exclude them anywhere. According to this decision, “popular sovereignty” went into the discard, since obviously whatever powers Congress lacked would be lacked by any territorial legislature created by Congress.



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