# LINCOLN'S LITERARY EXPERIMENTS.

WITH A LECTURE AND VERSES HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED.

PERHAPS no point in the career of Abraham Lincoln has excited more surprise or comment than his remarkable power of literary expression. It is a constant puzzle to many men of letters how a person growing up without the advantage of schools and books could have acquired the art which enabled him to write the Gettysburg address and the second inaugural. At first view, indeed, the question appears to be an educational one; and when men who devote their days and nights to rules, theories, and text-books find themselves baffled in such an acquirement, they naturally wonder how a laboring frontiersman could have gained it.

Their main error, of course, consists in assuming that it is merely an educational problem. The prime factor in such phenomena always consists of natural gifts — of the element we call genius. It is not because of their condition and surroundings, but in spite of them, that individuals occasionally manifest and develop these exceptional qualities. We find no such manifestations or results in the lives of the relatives, neighbors, or companions of Abraham Lincoln, who grew up with and about him in the woods and the cabins of Kentucky and Indiana, and who shared alike his experiences, his privations, and his opportunities, but were without his natural ability. This view, however, does not lessen our curiosity and interest in his educational processes.

We cannot better show his educational beginnings than by quoting his own statement made in two brief autobiographical sketches. In the first, written in December, 1859, he says:

> My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age, and he grew up literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "readin', writin', and cipherin'" to the rule of three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course, when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write, and cipher to the rule of three.

Again, in a sketch written immediately after his first nomination for President, to be used as material for a campaign biography, his boyhood is thus spoken of:

> Before leaving Kentucky, he and his sister were sent for short periods to A B C schools, the first kept by Zachariah Riney, and the second by Caleb Hazel. . . . His father's residence continued at the same place in Indiana till 1830. While here, Abraham went to A B C schools by littles, kept successively by Andrew Crawford,—— Sweeny, and Azel W. Dorsey. He does not remember any other. The family of Mr. Dorsey now resides in Schuyler County, Illinois. Abraham now thinks that the aggregate of all his schooling did not amount to one year. He was never in a college or academy as a student, and never inside of a college or academy building till since he had a law license. What he has in the way of education he has picked up. After he was twenty-three and had separated from his father, he studied English grammar — imperfectly, of course, but so as to speak and write as well as he now does. He studied and nearly mastered the six books of Euclid since he was a member of Congress.

In these extracts Lincoln gives us certainly not the full picture, but at least a vivid suggestion of the early influences acting upon his intellectual development — his isolation in childhood and boyhood; the personal privations under which he grew up; the ignorance and mental poverty of his parents, companions, and neighbors; the rudeness of the manners amid which he lived; the absence of example and emulation to prompt him to study and improvement; the lamentable insufficiency of tuition which came to him from the two or three school-masters competent to give only the most primary instruction; the scarcity of books, and their elementary contents,— always excepting the Bible,— which could fall into his hands.

These conditions, which followed him from his birth until he attained his majority, impressed upon him certain characteristics that never afterward left him,— a certain plainness of manner, of thought, and of speech, differentiating him in a marked and unmistakable degree from the boy and youth who, during the same period, had grown up in comfort and plenty, in schools and colleges, in intelligent society and social refinement,— forming a striking contrast between the man of the frontier and the man of the city.

Yet these disadvantages, which were destructive clogs to sluggish or ordinary intellects,



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