

**ABRAHAM
LINCOLN:
AN ESSAY**

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Abraham Lincoln: An Essay by Carl Schurz

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CARL SCHURZ

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LINCOLN:
AN ESSAY**



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

An Essay

BY

CARL SCHURZ



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This essay was originally published in The Atlantic Monthly as a review of "Abraham Lincoln, a History," by John G. Nicolay and John Hay. Owing to many suggestions and requests which have come from various quarters to the author as well as the publishers, a republication in book form has been undertaken, and the original text has been revised and slightly modified to adapt it to that purpose.

The portrait of Lincoln which forms the frontispiece is from a photograph taken (probably in 1860) before his election to the Presidency, and is regarded by competent judges as one of the best and most characteristic likenesses of him extant. An etching by M. Rajon, the late eminent French artist, and a recent masterly engraving on wood by Mr. Gustav Kruell, were both based upon it, but it is now for the first time reproduced, by the photogravure process, with absolute fidelity to the original, through the courtesy of its possessor, Mr. W. L. Garrison, of Boston.



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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

NO American can study the character and career of Abraham Lincoln without being carried away by sentimental emotions. We are always inclined to idealize that which we love, — a state of mind very unfavorable to the exercise of sober critical judgment. It is therefore not surprising that most of those who have written or spoken on that extraordinary man, even while conscientiously endeavoring to draw a life-like portraiture of his being, and to form a just estimate of his public conduct, should have drifted into more or less indiscriminating eulogy, painting his great features in the most glowing colors, and covering with tender shadings whatever might look like a blemish.

But his standing before posterity will not be exalted by mere praise of his virtues and abilities, nor by any concealment of his limitations and faults. The stature of the great man, one of whose peculiar charms consisted in his being so unlike all other great men, will rather lose than gain by the idealization which so easily runs into the commonplace. For it was distinctly the weird mixture of qualities and forces in him, of the lofty with the common, the ideal with the uncouth, of that which he had become with that which he had not ceased to be, that made him so fascinating a character among his fellow-men, gave him his singular power over their minds and hearts, and fitted him to be the greatest leader in the greatest crisis of our national life.

His was indeed a marvelous growth. The statesman or the military hero born and reared in a log cabin is a familiar figure in American history; but we may search in vain among our celebrities for

one whose origin and early life equaled Abraham Lincoln's in wretchedness. He first saw the light in a miserable hovel in Kentucky, on a farm consisting of a few barren acres in a dreary neighborhood; his father a typical "poor Southern white," shiftless and improvident, without ambition for himself or his children, constantly looking for a new piece of land on which he might make a living without much work; his mother, in her youth handsome and bright, grown prematurely coarse in feature and soured in mind by daily toil and care; the whole household squalid, cheerless, and utterly void of elevating inspirations. Only when the family had "moved" into the malarious backwoods of Indiana, the mother had died, and a step-mother, a woman of thrift and energy, had taken charge of the children, the shaggy-headed, ragged, barefooted, forlorn boy, then seven years old, "began to feel like a human being." Hard work was his early lot. When a mere boy he had to help in