CHAPTER II

INFLUENCE OF LINCOLN

I SUPPOSE ALL the children who were born about the time of the Civil War have recollections quite unlike those of the children who are living now. Although I was but four and a half years old when Lincoln died, I distinctly remember the day when I found on our two white gateposts American flags companioned with black. I tumbled down on the harsh gravel walk in my eager rush into the house to inquire what they were "there for." To my amazement I found my father in tears, something that I had never seen before, having assumed, as all children do, that grown-up people never cried. The two flags, my father's tears, and his impressive statement that the greatest man in the world had died, constituted my initiation, my baptism, as it were, into the thrilling and solemn interests of a world lying quite outside the two white gateposts. The great war touched children in many ways: I remember an engraved roster of names, headed by the words "Addams' Guard," and the whole surmounted by the insignia of the American eagle clutching many flags, which always hung in the family living-room. As children we used to read this list of names again and again. We could reach it only by dint of putting the family Bible on a chair and piling the dictionary on top of it; using the Bible to stand on was always accompanied by a little thrill of superstitious awe, although we carefully put the dictionary above that our profane feet might touch it alone. Having brought the roster within reach of our eager fingers,—fortunately it was glazed,—we would pick out the names of those who "had fallen on the field" from those who "had come back from the war," and from among the latter those whose children were our schoolmates. When drives were planned, we would say, "Let us take this road," that we might pass the farm where a soldier had once lived; if flowers from the garden were to be given away, we would want them to go to the mother of one of those heroes whose names we knew from the "Addams' Guard." If a guest should become interested in the roster on the wall, he was at once led by the eager children to a small picture of Colonel Davis which hung next the opposite window, that he might see the brave Colonel of the Regiment. The introduction to the picture of the one-armed man seemed to us a very solemn ceremony, and long after the guest was tired of listening, we would tell each other all about the local hero, who at the head of his troops had suffered wounds unto death. We liked very much to talk to a gentle old lady who lived in a white farmhouse a mile north of the village. She was the mother of the village hero, Tommy, and used to tell us of her long anxiety during the spring of '62; how she waited day after day for the hospital to surrender up her son, each morning airing the white homespun sheets and holding the little bedroom in immaculate readiness. It was after the battle of Fort Donelson that Tommy was wounded and had been taken to the hospital at Springfield; his father went down to him and saw him getting worse each week, until it was

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clear that he was going to die; but there was so much red tape about the department, and affairs were so confused, that his discharge could not be procured. At last the hospital surgeon intimated to his father that he should quietly take him away; a man as sick as that, it would be all right; but when they told Tommy, weak as he was, his eyes flashed, and he said, “No, sir; I will go out of the front door or I’ll die here.” Of course after that every man in the hospital worked for it, and in two weeks he was honorably discharged. When he came home at last, his mother’s heart was broken to see him so wan and changed. She would tell us of the long quiet days that followed his return, with the windows open so that the dying eyes might look over the orchard slope to the meadow beyond where the younger brothers were mowing the early hay. She told us of those days when his school friends from the Academy flocked in to see him, their old acknowledged leader, and of the burning words of earnest patriotism spoken in the crowded little room, so that in three months the Academy was almost deserted and the new Company who marched away in the autumn took as drummer boy Tommy’s third brother, who was only seventeen and too young for a regular. She remembered the still darker days that followed, when the bright drummer boy was in Andersonville prison, and little by little she learned to be reconciled that Tommy was safe in the peaceful home graveyard.

However much we were given to talk of war heroes, we always fell silent as we approached an isolated farmhouse in which two old people lived alone. Five of their sons had enlisted in the Civil War, and only the youngest had returned alive in the spring of 1865. In the autumn of the same year, when he was hunting for wild ducks in a swamp on the rough little farm itself, he was accidently shot and killed, and the old people were left alone to struggle with the half-cleared land as best they might. When we were driven past this forlorn little farm our childish voices always dropped into speculative whisperings as to how the accident could have happened to this remaining son out of all the men in the world, to him who had escaped so many chances of death! Our young hearts swelled in first rebellion against that which Walter Pater calls “the inexplicable shortcoming or misadventure on the part of life itself”; we were overwhelmingly oppressed by that grief of things as they are, so much more mysterious and intolerable than those griefs which we think dimly to trace to man’s own wrongdoing.

It was well perhaps that life thus early gave me a hint of one of her most obstinate and insoluble riddles, for I have sorely needed the sense of universality thus imparted to that mysterious injustice, the burden of which we are all forced to bear and with which I have become only too familiar.

My childish admiration for Lincoln is closely associated with a visit made to the war eagle, Old Abe, who, as we children well knew, lived in the state capital of Wisconsin, only sixty-five miles north of our house, really no farther than an eagle could easily fly! He had been carried by the Eighth Wisconsin Regiment through the entire war, and now dwelt an honored pensioner in the state building itself.

Many times, standing in the north end of our orchard, which was only twelve miles from that mysterious line which divided Illinois from Wisconsin, we anxiously scanned the deep

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sky, hoping to see Old Abe fly southward right over our apple trees, for it was clearly possible that he might at any moment escape from his keeper, who, although he had been a soldier and a sentinel, would have to sleep sometimes. We gazed with thrilled interest at one speck after another in the flawless sky, but although Old Abe never came to see us, a much more incredible thing happened, for we were at last taken to see him.

We started one golden summer's day, two happy children in the family carriage, with my father and mother and an older sister to whom, because she was just home from boarding school, we confidently appealed whenever we needed information. We were driven northward hour after hour, past harvest fields in which the stubble glinted from bronze to gold and the heavy-headed grain rested luxuriously in rounded shocks, until we reached that beautiful region of hills and lakes which surrounds the capital city of Wisconsin.

But although Old Abe, sitting sedately upon his high perch, was sufficiently like an uplifted ensign to remind us of a Roman eagle, and although his veteran keeper, clad in an old army coat, was ready to answer all our questions and to tell us of the thirty-six battles and skirmishes which Old Abe had passed unscathed, the crowning moment of the impressive journey came to me later, illustrating once more that children are as quick to catch the meaning of a symbol as they are unaccountably slow to understand the real world about them.

The entire journey to the veteran war eagle had itself symbolized that search for the heroic and perfect which so persistently haunts the young; and as I stood under the great white dome of Old Abe's stately home, for one brief moment the search was rewarded. I dimly caught a hint of what men have tried to say in their world-old effort to imprison a space in so divine a line that it shall hold only yearning devotion and high-hearted hopes. Certainly the utmost rim of my first dome was filled with the tumultuous impression of soldiers marching to death for freedom's sake, of pioneers streaming westward to establish self-government in yet another sovereign state. Only the great dome of St. Peter's itself has ever clutched my heart as did that modest curve which had sequestered from infinitude in a place small enough for my child's mind, the courage and endurance which I could not comprehend so long as it was lost in "the void of unresponsible space" under the vaulting sky itself. But through all my vivid sensations there persisted the image of the eagle in the corridor below and Lincoln himself as an epitome of all that was great and good. I dimly caught the notion of the martyred President as the standard bearer to the conscience of his countrymen, as the eagle had been the ensign of courage to the soldiers of the Wisconsin regiment.

Thirty-five years later, as I stood on the hill campus of the University of Wisconsin with a commanding view of the capitol building a mile directly across the city, I saw again the dome which had so uplifted my childish spirit. The University, which was celebrating it's fiftieth anniversary, had honored me with a doctor's degree, and in the midst of the academic pomp and the rejoicing, the dome again appeared to me as a fitting symbol of the state's aspiration even in its high mission of universal education.

Thousands of children in the sixties and seventies, in the simplicity which is given to the understanding of a child, caught a notion of imperishable heroism when they were told that

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brave men had lost their lives that the slaves might be free. At any moment the conversation of our elders might turn upon these heroic events; there were red-letter days, when a certain general came to see my father, and again when Governor Oglesby, whom all Illinois children called “Uncle Dick,” spent a Sunday under the pine trees in our front yard. We felt on those days a connection with the great world so much more heroic than the village world which surrounded us through all the other days. My father was a member of the state senate for the sixteen years between 1854 and 1870, and even as a little child I was dimly conscious of the grave march of public affairs in his comings and goings at the state capital.

He was much too occupied to allow time for reminiscence, but I remember overhearing a conversation between a visitor and himself concerning the stirring days before the war, when it was by no means certain that the Union men in the legislature would always have enough votes to keep Illinois from seceding. I heard with breathless interest my father’s account of the trip a majority of the legislators had made one dark day to St. Louis, that there might not be enough men for a quorum, and so no vote could be taken on the momentous question until the Union men could rally their forces.

My father always spoke of the martyred President as Mr. Lincoln, and I never heard the great name without a thrill. I remember the day—it must have been one of comparative leisure, perhaps a Sunday—when at my request my father took out of his desk a thin packet marked “Mr. Lincoln’s Letters,” the shortest one of which bore unmistakable traces of that remarkable personality. These letters began, “My dear Double-D’ed Addams,” and to the inquiry as to how the person thus addressed was about to vote on a certain measure then before the legislature, was added the assurance that he knew that this Addams “would vote according to his conscience,” but he begged to know in which direction the same conscience “was pointing.” As my father folded up the bits of paper I fairly held my breath in my desire that he should go on with the reminiscence of this wonderful man, whom he had known in his comparative obscurity, or better still, that he should be moved to tell some of the exciting incidents of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. There were at least two pictures of Lincoln that always hung in my father’s room, and one in our old-fashioned upstairs parlor, of Lincoln with little Tad. For one or all of these reasons I always tend to associate Lincoln with the tenderest thoughts of my father.

I recall a time of great perplexity in the summer of 1894, when Chicago was filled with federal troops sent there by the President of the United States, and their presence was resented by the governor of the state, that I walked the wearisome way from Hull-House to Lincoln Park—for no cars were running regularly at that moment of sympathetic strikes—in order to look at and gain magnanimous counsel, if I might, from the marvelous St. Gaudens statue which had been but recently been placed at the entrance of the park. Some of Lincoln’s immortal words were cut into the stone at his feet, and never did a distracted town more sorely need the healing of “with charity towards all” than did Chicago at that moment, and the tolerance of the man who had won charity for those on both sides of “an irrepressible conflict.”

Of the many things written of my father in that sad August in 1881, when he died, the one

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I cared for most was written by an old political friend of his who was then editor of a great Chicago daily. He wrote that while there were doubtless many members of the Illinois legislature who during the great contracts of the war time and the demoralizing reconstruction days that followed, had never accepted a bribe, he wished to bear testimony that he personally had known but this one man who had never been offered a bribe because bad men were instinctively afraid of him.

I feel now the hot chagrin with which I recalled this statement during those early efforts of Illinois in which Hull-House joined, to secure the passage of the first factory legislation. I was told by the representatives of an informal association of manufacturers that if the residents of Hull-House would drop this nonsense about a sweatshop bill, of which they knew nothing, certain business men would agree to give fifty thousand dollars within two years to be used for any of the philanthropic activities of the Settlement. As the fact broke upon me that I was being offered a bribe, the shame was enormously increased by the memory of this statement. What had befallen the daughter of my father that such a thing could happen to her? The salutary reflection that it could not have occurred unless a weakness in myself had permitted it, withheld me at least from an historic display of indignation before the two men making the offer, and I explained as gently as I could that we had no ambition to make Hull-House "the largest institution on the West Side," but that we were much concerned that our neighbors should be protected from untoward conditions of work, and—so much heroics, youth must permit itself—if to accomplish this the destruction of Hull-House was necessary, that we would cheerfully sing a Te Deum on its ruins. The good friend who had invited me to lunch at the Union League Club to meet two of his friends who wanted to talk over the sweat shop bill here kindly intervened, and we all hastened to cover the awkward situation by that scurrying away from ugly morality which seems to be an obligation of social intercourse.

Of the many old friends of my father who kindly came to look up his daughter in the first days of Hull-House, I recall none with more pleasure than Lyman Trumbull, whom we used to point out to members of the Young Citizen's Club as the man who had for days held in his keeping the Proclamation of Emancipation until his friend President Lincoln was ready to issue it. I remember the talk he gave at Hull-House on one of our early celebrations of Lincoln's birthday, his assertion that Lincoln was no cheap popular hero, that the "common people" would have to make an effort if they would understand his greatness, as Lincoln painstakingly made a long effort to understand the greatness of the people. There was something in the admiration of Lincoln's contemporaries, or at least of those men who had known him personally, which was quite unlike even the best of the devotion and reverent understanding which has developed since. In the first place, they had so large a fund of common experience; they too had pioneered in a western country, and had urged the development of canals and railroads in order that the raw prairie crops might be transported to market; they too had realized that if this last tremendous experiment in self-government failed here, it would be the disappointment of the centuries and that upon their ability to organize self-government in state, county, and town depended the verdict of history. These

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men also knew, as Lincoln himself did, that if this tremendous experiment was to come to fruition, it must be brought about by the people themselves; that there was no other capital fund upon which to draw. I remember an incident occurring when I was about fifteen years old, in which the conviction was driven into my mind that the people themselves were the great resource of the country. My father had made a little address of reminiscence at a meeting of "the old settlers of Stephenson County," which was held every summer in the grove beside the mill, relating his experiences in inducing the farmers of the county to subscribe for stock in the Northwestern Railroad, which was the first to penetrate the county and make a connection with the Great Lakes at Chicago. Many of the Pennsylvania German farmers doubted the value of "the whole new-fangled business," and had no use for any railroad, much less for one in which they were asked to risk their hard-earned savings. My father told of his despair in one farmers' community dominated by such prejudice which did not in the least give way under his argument, but finally melted under the enthusiasm of a high-spirited German matron who took a share to be paid for "out of butter and egg money." As he related his admiration of her, an old woman's piping voice in the audience called out: "I'm here to-day, Mr. Addams, and I'd do it again if you asked me." The old woman, bent and broken by her seventy years of toilsome life, was brought to the platform and I was much impressed by my father's grave presentation of her as "one of the public-spirited pioneers to whose heroic fortitude we are indebted for the development of this country." I remember that I was at that time reading with great enthusiasm Carlyle's "Heroes and Hero Worship," but on the evening of "Old Settlers' Day," to my surprise, I found it difficult to go on. Its sonorous sentences and exaltation of the man who "can" suddenly ceased to be convincing. I had already written down in my commonplace book a resolution to give at least twenty-five copies of this book each year to noble young people of my acquaintance. It is perhaps fitting in this chapter that the very first Christmas we spent at Hull-House, in spite of exigent demands upon my slender purse for candy and shoes, I gave to a club of boys twenty-five copies of the then new Carl Schurz's "Appreciation of Abraham Lincoln."

In our early effort at Hull-House to hand on to our neighbors whatever of help we had found for ourselves, we made much of Lincoln. We were often distressed by the children of immigrant parents who were ashamed of the pit whence they were digged, who repudiated the language and customs of their elders, and counted themselves successful as they were able to ignore the past. Whenever I held up Lincoln for their admiration as the greatest American, I invariably pointed out his marvelous power to retain and utilize past experiences; that he never forgot how the plain people in Sangamon County thought and felt when he himself had moved to town; that this habit was the foundation for his marvelous capacity for growth; that during those distracting years in Washington it enabled him to make clear beyond denial to the American people themselves, the goal toward which they were moving. I was sometimes bold enough to add that proficiency in the art of recognition and comprehension did not come without effort, and that certainly its attainment was necessary for any successful career in our conglomerate America.

An instance of the invigorating and clarifying power of Lincoln's influence came to me

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many years ago in England. I had spent two days in Oxford under the guidance of Arnold Toynbee's old friend Sidney Ball of St. John's College, who was closely associated with the group of scholars we all identify with the beginnings of the Settlement movement. It was easy to claim the philosophy of Thomas Hill Green, the road-building episode of Ruskin, the experimental living in the east end by Frederick Maurice, the London Workingman's College of Edward Dennison, as foundations laid by university men for the establishment of Toynbee Hall. I was naturally much interested in the beginnings of the movement whose slogan was "Back to the People," and which could doubtless claim the Settlement as one of its manifestations. Nevertheless the processes by which so simple a conclusion as residence among the poor in East London was reached, seemed to me very involved and roundabout. However inevitable these processes might be for class-conscious Englishmen, they could not but seem artificial to a western American who had been born in a rural community where the early pioneer life had made social distinctions impossible. Always on the alert lest American Settlements should become mere echoes and imitations of the English movement, I found myself assenting to what was shown me only with that part of my consciousness which had been formed by reading of English social movements, while at the same time the rustic American looked on in detached comment.

Why should an American be lost in admiration of a group of Oxford students because they went out to mend a disused road, inspired thereto by Ruskin's teaching for the bettering of the common life, when all the country roads in America were mended each spring by self-respecting citizens, who were thus carrying out the simple method devised by a democratic government for providing highways. No humor penetrated my high mood even as I somewhat uneasily recalled certain spring thaws when I had been mired in roads provided by the American citizen. I continued to fumble for a synthesis which I was unable to make until I developed that uncomfortable sense of playing two roles at once. It was therefore almost with a dual consciousness that I was ushered, during the last afternoon of my Oxford stay, into the drawing room of the Master of Balliol. Edward Caird's "Evolution of Religion," which I had read but a year or two before, had been of unspeakable comfort to me in the labyrinth of differing ethical teachings and religious creeds which the many immigrant colonies of our neighborhood presented. I remember that I wanted very much to ask the author himself how far it was reasonable to expect the same quality of virtue and a similar standard of conduct from these divers people. I was timidly trying to apply his method of study to those groups of homesick immigrants huddled together in strange tenement houses, among whom I seemed to detect the beginnings of a secular religion or at least of a wide humanitarianism evolved out of the various exigencies of the situation; somewhat as a household of children, whose mother is dead, out of their sudden necessity perform unaccustomed offices for each other and awkwardly exchange consolations, as children in happier households never dream of doing. Perhaps Mr. Caird could tell me whether there was any religious content in this

> Faith to each other; this fidelity
> Of fellow wanderers in a desert place.

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But when tea was over and my opportunity came for a talk with my host, I suddenly remembered, to the exclusion of all other associations, only Mr. Caird's fine analysis of Abraham Lincoln, delivered in a lecture two years before.

The memory of Lincoln, the mention of his name, came like a refreshing breeze from off the prairie, blowing aside all the scholarly implications in which I had become so reluctantly involved, and as the philosopher spoke of the great American "who was content merely to dig the channels through which the moral life of his countrymen might flow," I was gradually able to make a natural connection between this intellectual penetration at Oxford and the moral perception which is always necessary for the discovery of new methods by which to minister to human needs. In the unceasing ebb and flow of justice and oppression we must all dig channels as best we may, that at the propitious moment somewhat of the swelling tide may be conducted to the barren places of life.

Gradually a healing sense of well-being enveloped me and a quick remorse for my blindness, as I realized that no one among his own countrymen had been able to interpret Lincoln's greatness more nobly than this Oxford scholar had done, and that vision and wisdom as well as high motives must lie behind every effective stroke in the continuous labor for human equality; I remembered that another Master of Balliol, Jowett himself, had said that it was fortunate for society that every age possessed at least a few minds, which, like Arnold Toynbee's, were "perpetually disturbed over the apparent inequalities of mankind." Certainly both the English and American settlements could unite in confessing to that disturbance of mind.

Traces of this Oxford visit are curiously reflected in a paper I wrote soon after my return at the request of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. It begins as follows: —

The word "settlement," which we have borrowed from London, is apt to grate a little upon American ears. It is not, after all, so long ago that Americans who settled were those who had adventured into a new country, where they were pioneers in the midst of difficult surroundings. The word still implies migrating from one condition of life to another totally unlike it, and against this implication the resident of an American settlement takes alarm.

We do not like to acknowledge that Americans are divided into two nations, as her prime minister once admitted of England. We are not willing, openly and professedly, to assume that American citizens are broken up into classes, even if we make that assumption the preface to a plea that the superior class has duties to the inferior. Our democracy is still our most precious possession, and we do well to resent any inroads upon it, even though they may be made in the name of philanthropy.

Is it not Abraham Lincoln who has cleared the title to our democracy? He made plain, once for all, that democratic government, associated as it is with all the mistakes and shortcomings of the common people, still remains the most valuable contribution America has made to the moral life of the world.

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