

Nevertheless, slavery increased continually. I beg that you will pause a moment to consider the man who cleansed this terrible stain which obscured the stars of the American banner. I beg that you will pause a moment, for his immortal name has been invoked for the perpetuation of slavery. Ah! the past century has not, the century to come will not have, a figure so grand, because as evil disappears, so disappears heroism also.

I have often contemplated and described his life. Born in a cabin of Kentucky, of parents who could hardly read; born a new Moses in the solitude of the desert, where are forged all great and obstinate thoughts, monotonous like the desert, and, like the desert, sublime; growing up among those primeval forests, which, with their fragrance, send a cloud of incense, and, with their murmurs, a cloud of prayers to Heaven; a boatman at eight years in the impetuous current of the Ohio, and at seventeen in the vast and tranquil waters of the Mississippi; later a woodman, with axe and arm felling the immemorial trees, to open a way to unexplored regions for his tribe of wandering workers; reading no other book than the Bible,* the book of great sorrows and great hopes, dictated often by prophets to the sound of fetters they dragged through Nineveh and Babylon; a child of Nature, in a word, by one of those miracles only comprehensible among free peoples he fought for the country and was raised by his fellow-citizens to the Congress at Washington, and by the nation to the Presidency of the Republic; and when the evil grew more virulent, when those States were dissolved, when the slaveholders uttered their wacry, and the slaves their groans of despair—the woodcutter, the boatman, the son of the great West, the descendant of Quakers, humblest of the humble before his conscience, greatest of the great before history, ascends the Capitol, the greatest moral height of our time, and strong and serene with his conscience and his thought; before him a veteran army, hostile Europe behind him; England favoring the South; France encouraging reaction in Mexico, in his hands the riven country; he arms two million men, gathers a half million of horses, sends his artillery twelve hundred miles in a week, from the banks of the Potomac to the shores of Tennessee; fights more than six hundred battles, renews before Richmond the deeds of Alexander, of Cæsar; and, after having emancipated three million slaves, that nothing might be wanting, he dies in the very moment of victory—like Christ, like Socrates, like all redcmers, at the foot of his work. His work! Sublime achievement! over which humanity shall eternally shed its tears, and God his benediction!

* An error due to imperfect information on the part of the speaker. Lincoln read almost every book that came in his way.