

The Critic.

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THE EARLY YEARS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

No. III.

The flower of the heroic race in the neighbourhood of Salem, were the "Clary's Grove boys," whose chief and champion was Jack Armstrong. "Never," we are assured, "was there a more generous parcel of ruffians than those over whom Jack held sway." It does not appear, however, that the term ruffian is altogether misplaced. The boys were in the habit of "initiating" candidates for admission to society at New Salem. "They first bantered the gentleman to run a foot race, jump, pitch the ball, or wrestle; and if none of these propositions seemed agreeable to him, they would request to know what he would do in case another gentleman should pull his nose or squirt tobacco juice in his face. If he did not seem entirely decided in his views as to what should be done in such a contingency, perhaps he would be nailed in a hogshod and rolled down New Salem hill, perhaps his ideas would be brightened by a brief ducking in the Sangamon; or perhaps he would be scoffed, kicked and cuffed by a great number of persons in concert, until he reached the confines of the village, and then turned adrift as being unfit company for the people of that settlement." If the stranger consented to race or wrestle, it was arranged that there should be foul play, which would lead to a fight; a proper display of mettle in which was accepted as proof of the "gentleman's" fitness for society. Abe escaped initiation; his length and strength of limb being apparently satisfactory evidence of his social respectability. But Clary's Grove was at last brought down on him by the indiscretion of his friend and admirer, Offutt, who was already beginning to run him for President, and whose vauntings of his powers made a trial of strength inevitable. A wrestling match was contrived between Lincoln and Jack Armstrong, and money, jackknives and whiskey were freely staked on the result. Neither combatant could throw the other, and Abe proposed to Jack to "quit." But Jack, goaded on by his partisans, resorted to a "foul," on which Abe's righteous wrath blazed up, and taking the champion of Clary's Grove by the throat he "shook him like a child." A fight was impending, and Abe, his back planted against Offutt's store, was facing a circle of foes, when a mediator appeared. Jack Armstrong was so satisfied of the strength of Abe's arm, that he at once declared him the best fellow that ever came into the settlement, and the two thenceforth reigned conjointly over the roughs and bullies of New Salem. Abe seems always to have used his power humanely and to have done his best to substitute arbitration for war. A strange man coming into the settlement, on being beset as usual by Clary's Grove and insulted by Jack Armstrong, knocked the bully down with a stick. Jack being

as strong as two of him was going to "whip him badly," when Abe interposed, "Well Jack, what did you say to the man?" Jack repeated his words "And what would you do if you were in a strange place and you were called a d—d liar?" "Whip him by—." "Then that man has done to you no more than you have done to him." Jack acknowledged the golden rule and "treated" his intended victim. If there were ever dissensions between the two "Caesars" of Salem, it was because Jack "in the abundance of his animal spirits" was addicted to nailing people in barrels and rolling them down the hill, while Abe was always on the side of mercy.

Abe's popularity grew apace; his ambition grew with it; it is astonishing how readily the plant sprouts on that soil. He was at this time carrying on his education evidently with a view to public life. Books were not easily found. He wanted to study English Grammar, considering that accomplishment desirable for a statesman; and, being told that there was a grammar in a house six miles from Salem, he left his breakfast at once and walked off to borrow it. He would slip away into the woods and spend hours in study and thinking. He sat up late at night, and as light was expensive, made a blaze of shavings in the cooper's shop. He waylaid every visitor to New Salem who had any pretence to scholarship, and extracted explanations of things which he did not understand. It does not appear that the work of Adam Smith, or any work on political economy, currency, or any financial subject fell into the hands of the student who was destined to conduct the most tremendous operations in the whole history of finance.

The next episode in Lincoln's life which may be regarded as a part of his training was the command of a company of militia in the "Black Hawk" war. Black Hawk was an Indian Chief of great craft and power, and, apparently, of fine character, who had the effrontery to object to being improved off the face of creation, an offence which he aggravated by an hereditary attachment to the British. At a muster of the Sangamon company at Clary's Grove, Lincoln was elected captain. The election was a proof of his popularity; but he found it rather hard to manage his constituents in the field. One morning on the march the Captain commanded his orderly to form the company for parade; but when the orderly called "parade," the men called "parade" too but would not fall into line. They had found their way to the officer's liquor the evening before. The regiment had to march and leave the company behind. About ten o'clock the company set out to follow; but when it had marched two miles "the drunken ones lay down and slept their drink off." Lincoln, who seems to have been perfectly blameless, was placed under arrest and condemned to carry a wooden sword; but it does not appear that any notice was taken of the conduct of that portion of the sovereign people which lay down drunk on the march when the army was advancing against the enemy. Something like this was probably the state of things in the Northern army at the beginning of the civil war, before discipline had been enforced by disaster. The campaign opened with a cleverly-won victory on the part of Black Hawk, and a rapid retrograde movement on the part of the militia, as to which we will be content to say with Mr. Lamon "of drunkenness no public account makes mention, and individual cowardice is never to be imputed to American troops." Ultimately, however, Black Hawk was overpowered and most of his men met their doom in attempting to retreat across the Mississippi. "During this short Indian campaign," says one who took part in it, "we had some hard times, often hungry; but we had a great deal of sport, especially at nights—foot racing, some horse racing,