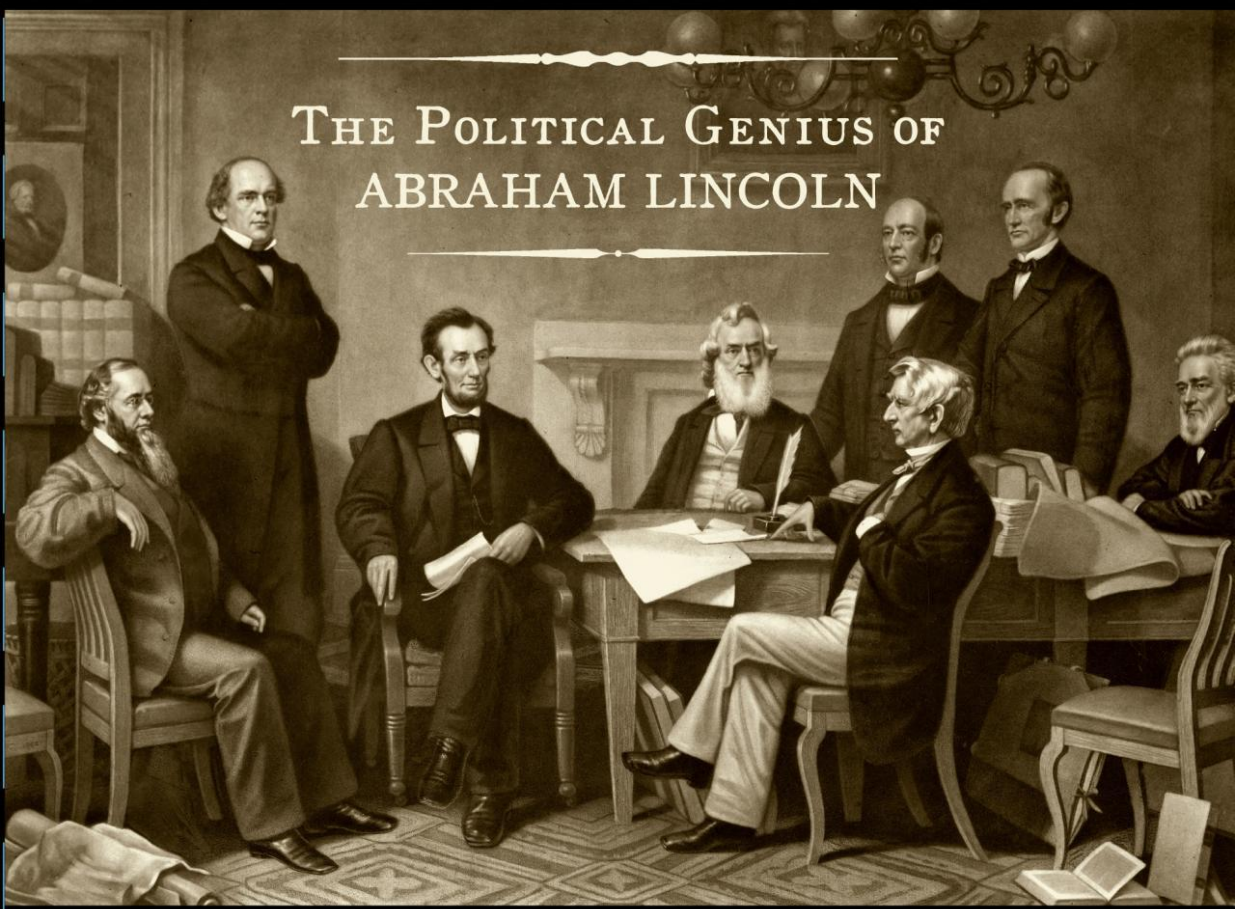
Team of Rivals



The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln

Doris Kearns Goodwin

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize

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Endpapers: *(Front)* View from Pennsylvania Avenue of the unfinished U.S. Capitol in the 1850s; *(back)* view from Pennsylvania Avenue of the finished Capitol building, taken after Lincoln's death.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1876, the celebrated orator Frederick Douglass dedicated a monument in Washington, D.C., erected by black Americans to honor Abraham Lincoln. The former slave told his audience that "there is little necessity on this occasion to speak at length and critically of this great and good man, and of his high mission in the world. That ground has been fully occupied. . . . The whole field of fact and fancy has been gleaned and garnered. Any man can say things that are true of Abraham Lincoln, but no man can say anything that is new of Abraham Lincoln."

Speaking only eleven years after Lincoln's death, Douglass was too close to assess the fascination that this plain and complex, shrewd and transparent, tender and iron-willed leader would hold for generations of Americans. In the nearly two hundred years since his birth, countless historians and writers have uncovered new documents, provided fresh insights, and developed an ever-deepening understanding of our sixteenth president.

In my own effort to illuminate the character and career of Abraham Lincoln, I have coupled the account of his life with the stories of the remarkable men who were his rivals for the 1860 Republican presidential nomination—New York senator William H. Seward, Ohio governor Salmon P. Chase, and Missouri's distinguished elder statesman Edward Bates.

Taken together, the lives of these four men give us a picture of the path taken by ambitious young men in the North who came of age in the early decades of the nineteenth century. All four studied law, became distinguished orators, entered politics, and opposed the spread of slavery. Their upward climb was one followed by many thousands who left the small towns of their birth to seek opportunity and adventure in the rapidly growing cities of a dynamic, expanding America.

Just as a hologram is created through the interference of light from separate sources, so the lives and impressions of those who companioned Lincoln give us a clearer and more dimensional picture of the president himself. Lincoln's barren childhood, his lack of schooling, his relationships with male friends, his complicated marriage, the nature of his ambition, and his ruminations about death can be analyzed more clearly when he is placed side by side with his three contemporaries.

When Lincoln won the nomination, each of his celebrated rivals believed the wrong man had been chosen. Ralph Waldo Emerson recalled

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his first reception of the news that the "comparatively unknown name of Lincoln" had been selected: "we heard the result coldly and sadly. It seemed too rash, on a purely local reputation, to build so grave a trust in such anxious times."

Lincoln seemed to have come from nowhere—a backwoods lawyer who had served one undistinguished term in the House of Representatives and had lost two consecutive contests for the U. S. Senate. Contemporaries and historians alike have attributed his surprising nomination to chance—the fact that he came from the battleground state of Illinois and stood in the center of his party. The comparative perspective suggests a different interpretation. When viewed against the failed efforts of his rivals, it is clear that Lincoln won the nomination because he was shrewdest and canniest of them all. More accustomed to relying upon himself to shape events, he took the greatest control of the process leading up to the nomination, displaying a fierce ambition, an exceptional political acumen, and a wide range of emotional strengths, forged in the crucible of personal hardship, that took his unsuspecting rivals by surprise.

That Lincoln, after winning the presidency, made the unprecedented decision to incorporate his eminent rivals into his political family, the cabinet, was evidence of a profound self-confidence and a first indication of what would prove to others a most unexpected greatness. Seward became secretary of state, Chase secretary of the treasury, and Bates attorney general. The remaining top posts Lincoln offered to three former Democrats whose stories also inhabit these pages—Gideon Welles, Lincoln's "Neptune," was made secretary of the navy, Montgomery Blair became postmaster general, and Edwin M. Stanton, Lincoln's "Mars," eventually became secretary of war. Every member of this administration was better known, better educated, and more experienced in public life than Lincoln. Their presence in the cabinet might have threatened to eclipse the obscure prairie lawyer from Springfield.

It soon became clear, however, that Abraham Lincoln would emerge the undisputed captain of this most unusual cabinet, truly a team of rivals. The powerful competitors who had originally disdained Lincoln became colleagues who helped him steer the country through its darkest days. Seward was the first to appreciate Lincoln's remarkable talents, quickly realizing the futility of his plan to relegate the president to a figurehead role. In the months that followed, Seward would become Lincoln's closest friend and advisor in the administration. Though Bates initially viewed Lincoln as a well-meaning but incompetent administrator, he eventually concluded that the president was an unmatched leader, "very near being a perfect man." Edwin Stanton, who had treated Lincoln with contempt at

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their initial acquaintance, developed a great respect for the commander in chief and was unable to control his tears for weeks after the president's death. Even Chase, whose restless ambition for the presidency was never realized, at last acknowledged that Lincoln had outmaneuvered him.

This, then, is a story of Lincoln's political genius revealed through his extraordinary array of personal qualities that enabled him to form friendships with men who had previously opposed him; to repair injured feelings that, left untended, might have escalated into permanent hostility; to assume responsibility for the failures of subordinates; to share credit with ease; and to learn from mistakes. He possessed an acute understanding of the sources of power inherent in the presidency, an unparalleled ability to keep his governing coalition intact, a tough-minded appreciation of the need to protect his presidential prerogatives, and a masterful sense of timing. His success in dealing with the strong egos of the men in his cabinet suggests that in the hands of a truly great politician the qualities we generally associate with decency and morality—kindness, sensitivity, compassion, honesty, and empathy—can also be impressive political resources.

Before I began this book, aware of the sorrowful aspect of his features and the sadness attributed to him by his contemporaries, I had assumed that Lincoln suffered from chronic depression. Yet, with the exception of two despondent episodes in his early life that are described in this story, there is no evidence that he was immobilized by depression. On the contrary, even during the worst days of the war, he retained his ability to function at a very high level.

To be sure, he had a melancholy temperament, most likely imprinted on him from birth. But melancholy differs from depression. It is not an illness; it does not proceed from a specific cause; it is an aspect of one's nature. It has been recognized by artists and writers for centuries as a potential source of creativity and achievement.

Moreover, Lincoln possessed an uncanny understanding of his shifting moods, a profound self-awareness that enabled him to find constructive ways to alleviate sadness and stress. Indeed, when he is compared with his colleagues, it is clear that he possessed the most even-tempered disposition of them all. Time and again, he was the one who dispelled his colleagues' anxiety and sustained their spirits with his gift for storytelling and his life-affirming sense of humor. When resentment and contention threatened to destroy his administration, he refused to be provoked by petty grievances, to submit to jealousy, or to brood over perceived slights. Through the appalling pressures he faced day after day, he retained an unflagging faith in his country's cause.

The comparative approach has also yielded an interesting cast of female

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characters to provide perspective on the Lincolns' marriage. The fiercely idealistic Frances Seward served as her husband's social conscience. The beautiful Kate Chase made her father's quest for the presidency the ruling passion of her life, while the devoted Julia Bates created a blissful home that gradually enticed her husband away from public ambitions. Like Frances Seward, Mary Lincoln displayed a striking intelligence; like Kate Chase, she possessed what was then considered an unladylike interest in politics. Mary's detractors have suggested that if she had created a more tranquil domestic life for her family, Lincoln might have been satisfied to remain in Springfield. Yet the idea that he could have been a contented homebody, like Edward Bates, contradicts everything we know of the powerful ambition that drove him from his earliest days.

By widening the lens to include Lincoln's colleagues and their families, my story benefited from a treasure trove of primary sources that have not generally been used in Lincoln biographies. The correspondence of the Seward family contains nearly five thousand letters, including an eight-hundred-page diary that Seward's daughter Fanny kept from her fifteenth year until two weeks before her death at the age of twenty-one. In addition to the voluminous journals in which Salmon Chase recorded the events of four decades, he wrote thousands of personal letters. A revealing section of his daughter Kate's diary also survives, along with dozens of letters from her husband, William Sprague. The unpublished section of the diary that Bates began in 1846 provides a more intimate glimpse of the man than the published diary that starts in 1859. Letters to his wife, Julia, during his years in Congress expose the warmth beneath his stolid exterior. Stanton's emotional letters to his family and his sister's unpublished memoir reveal the devotion and idealism that connected the passionate, hard-driving war secretary to his president. The correspondence of Montgomery Blair's sister, Elizabeth Blair Lee, and her husband, Captain Samuel Phillips Lee, leaves a memorable picture of daily life in wartime Washington. The diary of Gideon Welles, of course, has long been recognized for its penetrating insights into the workings of the Lincoln administration.

Through these fresh sources, we see Lincoln liberated from his familiar frock coat and stovepipe hat. We see him late at night relaxing at Seward's house, his long legs stretched before a blazing fire, talking of many things besides the war. We hear his curious and infectious humor in the punch lines of his favorite stories and sit in on clamorous cabinet discussions regarding emancipation and Reconstruction. We feel the enervating tension in the telegraph office as Lincoln clasps Stanton's hand, awaiting bulletins from the battlefield. We follow him to the front on a dozen occasions and observe the invigorating impact of his sympathetic, kindly presence on

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the morale of the troops. In all these varied encounters, Lincoln's vibrant personality shines through. In the mirrors of his colleagues, he comes to life.

As a young man, Lincoln worried that the "field of glory" had been harvested by the founding fathers, that nothing had been left for his generation but modest ambitions. In the 1850s, however, the wheel of history turned. The rising intensity of the slavery issue and the threatening dissolution of the nation itself provided Lincoln and his colleagues with an opportunity to save and improve the democracy established by Washington, Jefferson, and Adams, creating what Lincoln later called "a new birth of freedom." Without the march of events that led to the Civil War, Lincoln still would have been a good man, but most likely would never have been publicly recognized as a great man. It was history that gave him the opportunity to manifest his greatness, providing the stage that allowed him to shape and transform our national life.

For better than thirty years, as a working historian, I have written on leaders I knew, such as Lyndon Johnson, and interviewed intimates of the Kennedy family and many who knew Franklin Roosevelt, a leader perhaps as indispensable in his way as was Lincoln to the social and political direction of the country. After living with the subject of Abraham Lincoln for a decade, however, reading what he himself wrote and what hundreds of others have written about him, following the arc of his ambition, and assessing the inevitable mixture of human foibles and strengths that made up his temperament, after watching him deal with the terrible deprivations of his childhood, the deaths of his children, and the horror that engulfed the entire nation, I find that after nearly two centuries, the uniquely American story of Abraham Lincoln has unequalled power to captivate the imagination and to inspire emotion.

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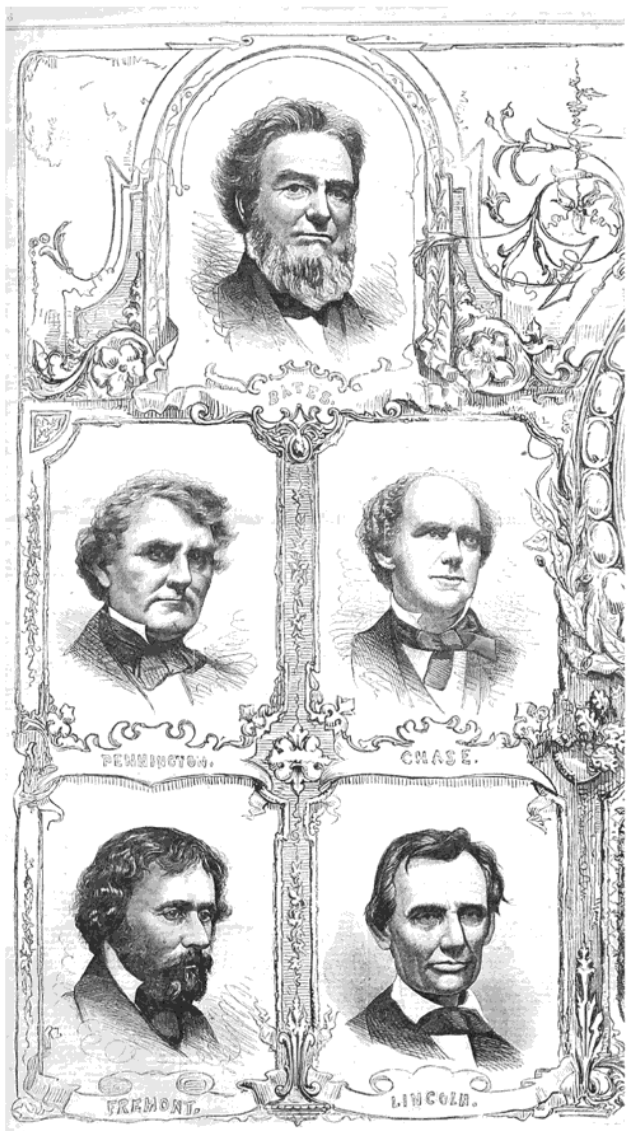

PROMINENT CANDIDATES

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PART I

THE RIVALS

FOR THE REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION AT CHICAGO.—[From Photographs by Brady.]

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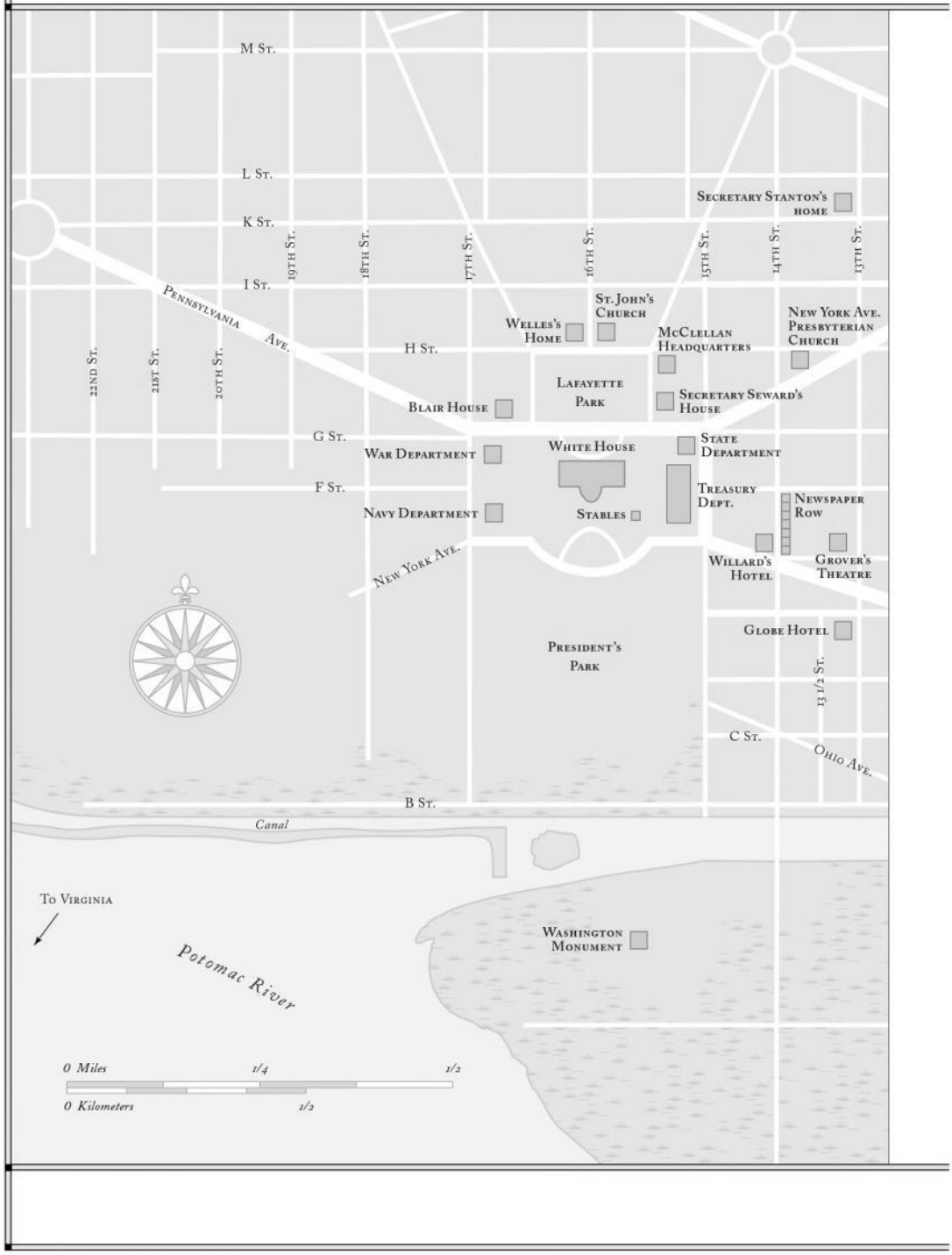
▪ WASHINGTON, D.C.,



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During the Civil War

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CHAPTER 1

FOUR MEN WAITING

On May 18, 1860, the day when the Republican Party would nominate its candidate for president, Abraham Lincoln was up early. As he climbed the stairs to his plainly furnished law office on the west side of the public square in Springfield, Illinois, breakfast was being served at the 130-room Chenery House on Fourth Street. Fresh butter, flour, lard, and eggs were being put out for sale at the City Grocery Store on North Sixth Street. And in the morning newspaper, the proprietors at Smith, Wickersham & Company had announced the arrival of a large spring stock of silks, calicos, ginghams, and linens, along with a new supply of the latest styles of hosiery and gloves.

The Republicans had chosen to meet in Chicago. A new convention hall called the "Wigwam" had been constructed for the occasion. The first ballot was not due to be called until 10 a.m. and Lincoln, although patient by nature, was visibly "nervous, fidgety, and intensely excited." With an outside chance to secure the Republican nomination for the highest office of the land, he was unable to focus on his work. Even under ordinary circumstances many would have found concentration difficult in the untidy office Lincoln shared with his younger partner, William Herndon. Two worktables, piled high with papers and correspondence, formed a T in the center of the room. Additional documents and letters spilled out from the drawers and pigeonholes of an outmoded secretary in the corner. When he needed a particular piece of correspondence, Lincoln had to rifle through disorderly stacks of paper, rummaging, as a last resort, in the lining of his old plug hat, where he often put stray letters or notes.

Restlessly descending to the street, he passed the state capitol building, set back from the road, and the open lot where he played handball with his friends, and climbed a short set of stairs to the office of the *Illinois State Journal*, the local Republican newspaper. The editorial room on the sec-

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ond floor, with a central large wood-burning stove, was a gathering place for the exchange of news and gossip.

He wandered over to the telegraph office on the north side of the square to see if any new dispatches had come in. There were few outward signs that this was a day of special moment and expectation in the history of Springfield, scant record of any celebration or festivity planned should Lincoln, long their fellow townsman, actually secure the nomination. That he had garnered the support of the Illinois delegation at the state convention at Decatur earlier that month was widely understood to be a "complimentary" gesture. Yet if there were no firm plans to celebrate his dark horse bid, Lincoln knew well the ardor of his staunch circle of friends already at work on his behalf on the floor of the Wigwam.

The hands of the town clock on the steeple of the Baptist church on Adams Street must have seemed not to move. When Lincoln learned that his longtime friend James Conkling had returned unexpectedly from the convention the previous evening, he walked over to Conkling's office above Chatterton's jewelry store. Told that his friend was expected within the hour, he returned to his own quarters, intending to come back as soon as Conkling arrived.

Lincoln's shock of black hair, brown furrowed face, and deep-set eyes made him look older than his fifty-one years. He was a familiar figure to almost everyone in Springfield, as was his singular way of walking, which gave the impression that his long, gaunt frame needed oiling. He plodded forward in an awkward manner, hands hanging at his sides or folded behind his back. His step had no spring, his partner William Herndon recalled. He lifted his whole foot at once rather than lifting from the toes and then thrust the whole foot down on the ground rather than landing on his heel. "His legs," another observer noted, "seemed to drag from the knees down, like those of a laborer going home after a hard day's work."

His features, even supporters conceded, were not such "as belong to a handsome man." In repose, his face was "so overspread with sadness," the reporter Horace White noted, that it seemed as if "Shakespeare's melancholy Jacques had been translated from the forest of Arden to the capital of Illinois." Yet, when Lincoln began to speak, White observed, "this expression of sorrow dropped from him instantly. His face lighted up with a winning smile, and where I had a moment before seen only leaden sorrow I now beheld keen intelligence, genuine kindness of heart, and the promise of true friendship." If his appearance seemed somewhat odd, what captivated admirers, another contemporary observed, was "his winning manner, his ready good humor, and his unaffected kindness and gentleness."

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Five minutes in his presence, and "you cease to think that he is either homely or awkward."

Springfield had been Lincoln's home for nearly a quarter of a century. He had arrived in the young city to practice law at twenty-eight years old, riding into town, his great friend Joshua Speed recalled, "on a borrowed horse, with no earthly property save a pair of saddle-bags containing a few clothes." The city had grown rapidly, particularly after 1839, when it became the capital of Illinois. By 1860, Springfield boasted nearly ten thousand residents, though its business district, designed to accommodate the expanding population that arrived in town when the legislature was in session, housed thousands more. Ten hotels radiated from the public square where the capitol building stood. In addition, there were multiple saloons and restaurants, seven newspapers, three billiard halls, dozens of retail stores, three military armories, and two railroad depots.

Here in Springfield, in the Edwards mansion on the hill, Lincoln had courted and married "the belle of the town," young Mary Todd, who had come to live with her married sister, Elizabeth, wife of Ninian Edwards, the well-to-do son of the former governor of Illinois. Raised in a prominent Lexington, Kentucky, family, Mary had received an education far superior to most girls her age. For four years she had studied languages and literature in an exclusive boarding school and then spent two additional years in what was considered graduate study. The story is told of Lincoln's first meeting with Mary at a festive party. Captivated by her lively manner, intelligent face, clear blue eyes, and dimpled smile, Lincoln reportedly said, "I want to dance with you in the worst way." And, Mary laughingly told her cousin later that night, "he certainly did." In Springfield, all their children were born, and one was buried. In that spring of 1860, Mary was forty-two, Robert sixteen, William nine, and Thomas seven. Edward, the second son, had died at the age of three.

Their home, described at the time as a modest "two-story frame house, having a wide hall running through the centre, with parlors on both sides," stood close to the street and boasted few trees and no garden. "The adornments were few, but chastely appropriate," one contemporary observer noted. In the center hall stood "the customary little table with a white marble top," on which were arranged flowers, a silver-plated ice-water pitcher, and family photographs. Along the walls were positioned some chairs and a sofa. "Everything," a journalist observed, "tended to represent the home of a man who has battled hard with the fortunes of life, and whose hard experience had taught him to enjoy whatever of success belongs to him, rather in solid substance than in showy display."

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During his years in Springfield, Lincoln had forged an unusually loyal circle of friends. They had worked with him in the state legislature, helped him in his campaigns for Congress and the Senate, and now, at this very moment, were guiding his efforts at the Chicago convention, "moving heaven & Earth," they assured him, in an attempt to secure him the nomination. These steadfast companions included David Davis, the Circuit Court judge for the Eighth District, whose three-hundred-pound body was matched by "a big brain and a big heart"; Norman Judd, an attorney for the railroads and chairman of the Illinois Republican state central committee; Leonard Swett, a lawyer from Bloomington who believed he knew Lincoln "as intimately as I have ever known any man in my life"; and Stephen Logan, Lincoln's law partner for three years in the early forties.

Many of these friendships had been forged during the shared experience of the "circuit," the eight weeks each spring and fall when Lincoln and his fellow lawyers journeyed together throughout the state. They shared rooms and sometimes beds in dusty village inns and taverns, spending long evenings gathered together around a blazing fire. The economics of the legal profession in sparsely populated Illinois were such that lawyers had to move about the state in the company of the circuit judge, trying thousands of small cases in order to make a living. The arrival of the traveling bar brought life and vitality to the county seats, fellow rider Henry Whitney recalled. Villagers congregated on the courthouse steps. When the court sessions were complete, everyone would gather in the local tavern from dusk to dawn, sharing drinks, stories, and good cheer.

In these convivial settings, Lincoln was invariably the center of attention. No one could equal his never-ending stream of stories nor his ability to reproduce them with such contagious mirth. As his winding tales became more famous, crowds of villagers awaited his arrival at every stop for the chance to hear a master storyteller. Everywhere he went, he won devoted followers, friendships that later emboldened his quest for office. Political life in these years, the historian Robert Wiebe has observed, "broke down into clusters of men who were bound together by mutual trust." And no political circle was more loyally bound than the band of compatriots working for Lincoln in Chicago.

The prospects for his candidacy had taken wing in 1858 after his brilliant campaign against the formidable Democratic leader, Stephen Douglas, in a dramatic senate race in Illinois that had attracted national attention. Though Douglas had won a narrow victory, Lincoln managed to unite the disparate elements of his state's fledgling Republican Party—that curious amalgamation of former Whigs, antislavery Democrats, nativists, foreigners, radicals, and conservatives. In the mid-1850s, the Republican

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Party had come together in state after state in the North with the common goal of preventing the spread of slavery to the territories. "Of *strange*, *discordant*, and even, *hostile* elements," Lincoln proudly claimed, "we gathered from the four winds, and *formed* and fought the battle through." The story of Lincoln's rise to power was inextricably linked to the increasing intensity of the antislavery cause. Public feeling on the slavery issue had become so flammable that Lincoln's seven debates with Douglas were carried in newspapers across the land, proving the prairie lawyer from Springfield more than a match for the most likely Democratic nominee for the presidency.

Furthermore, in an age when speech-making prowess was central to political success, when the spoken word filled the air "from sun-up til sundown," Lincoln's stirring oratory had earned the admiration of a far-flung audience who had either heard him speak or read his speeches in the paper. As his reputation grew, the invitations to speak multiplied. In the year before the convention, he had appeared before tens of thousands of people in Ohio, Iowa, Indiana, Wisconsin, Kentucky, New York, and New England. The pinnacle of his success was reached at Cooper Union in New York, where, on the evening of February 27, 1860, before a zealous crowd of more than fifteen hundred people, Lincoln delivered what the *New York Tribune* called "one of the happiest and most convincing political arguments ever made in this City" in defense of Republican principles and the need to confine slavery to the places where it already existed. "The vast assemblage frequently rang with cheers and shouts of applause, which were prolonged and intensified at the close. No man ever before made such an impression on his first appeal to a New-York audience."

Lincoln's success in the East bolstered his supporters at home. On May 10, the fired-up Republican state convention at Decatur nominated him for president, labeling him "the Rail Candidate for President" after two fence rails he had supposedly split in his youth were ceremoniously carried into the hall. The following week, the powerful Chicago *Press and Tribune* formally endorsed Lincoln, arguing that his moderate politics represented the thinking of most people, that he would come into the contest "with no clogs, no embarrassment," an "honest man" who represented all the "fundamentals of Republicanism," with "due respect for the rights of the South."

Still, Lincoln clearly understood that he was "new in the field," that outside of Illinois he was not "the first choice of a very great many." His only political experience on the national level consisted of two failed Senate races and a single term in Congress that had come to an end nearly a dozen years earlier. By contrast, the three other contenders for the nomi-

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nation were household names in Republican circles. William Henry Seward had been a celebrated senator from New York for more than a decade and governor of his state for two terms before he went to Washington. Ohio's Salmon P. Chase, too, had been both senator and governor, and had played a central role in the formation of the national Republican Party. Edward Bates was a widely respected elder statesman, a delegate to the convention that had framed the Missouri Constitution, and a former congressman whose opinions on national matters were still widely sought.

Recognizing that Seward held a commanding lead at the start, followed by Chase and Bates, Lincoln's strategy was to give offense to no one. He wanted to leave the delegates "in a mood to come to us, if they shall be compelled to give up their first love." This was clearly understood by Lincoln's team in Chicago and by all the delegates whom Judge Davis had commandeered to join the fight. "We are laboring to make you the second choice of all the Delegations we can, where we can't make you first choice," Scott County delegate Nathan Knapp told Lincoln when he first arrived in Chicago. "Keep a good nerve," Knapp advised, "be not surprised at any result—but I tell you that your chances are not the worst . . . brace your nerves for any result." Knapp's message was followed by one from Davis himself on the second day of the convention. "Am very hopeful," he warned Lincoln, but "dont be Excited."

The warnings were unnecessary—Lincoln was, above all, a realist who fully understood that he faced an uphill climb against his better-known rivals. Anxious to get a clearer picture of the situation, he headed back to Conkling's office, hoping that his old friend had returned. This time he was not disappointed. As Conkling later told the story, Lincoln stretched himself upon an old settee that stood by the front window, "his head on a cushion and his feet over the end," while Conkling related all he had seen and heard in the previous two days before leaving the Wigwam. Conkling told Lincoln that Seward was in trouble, that he had enemies not only in other states but at home in New York. If Seward was not nominated on the first ballot, Conkling predicted, Lincoln would be the nominee.

Lincoln replied that "he hardly thought this could be possible and that in case Mr. Seward was not nominated on the first ballot, it was his judgment that Mr. Chase of Ohio or Mr. Bates of Missouri would be the nominee." Conkling disagreed, citing reasons why each of those two candidates would have difficulty securing the nomination. Assessing the situation with his characteristic clearheadedness, Lincoln could not fail to perceive some truth in what his friend was saying; yet having tasted so many disappointments, he saw no benefit in letting his hopes run wild.

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"Well, Conkling," he said slowly, pulling his long frame up from the settee, "I believe I will go back to my office and practice law."

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WHILE LINCOLN STRUGGLED to sustain his hopes against the likelihood of failure, William Henry Seward was in the best of spirits. He had left Washington three days earlier to repair to his hometown of Auburn, New York, situated in the Finger Lakes Region of the most populous state of the Union, to share the anticipated Republican nomination in the company of family and friends.

Nearly sixty years old, with the vitality and appearance of a man half his age, Seward typically rose at 6 a.m. when first light slanted into the bedroom window of his twenty-room country home. Rising early allowed him time to complete his morning constitutional through his beloved garden before the breakfast bell was rung. Situated on better than five acres of land, the Seward mansion was surrounded by manicured lawns, elaborate gardens, and walking paths that wound beneath elms, mountain ash, evergreens, and fruit trees. Decades earlier, Seward had supervised the planting of every one of these trees, which now numbered in the hundreds. He had spent thousands of hours fertilizing and cultivating his flowering shrubs. With what he called "a lover's interest," he inspected them daily. His horticultural passion was in sharp contrast to Lincoln's lack of interest in planting trees or growing flowers at his Springfield home. Having spent his childhood laboring long hours on his father's struggling farm, Lincoln found little that was romantic or recreational about tilling the soil.

When Seward "came in to the table," his son Frederick recalled, "he would announce that the hyacinths were in bloom, or that the bluebirds had come, or whatever other change the morning had brought." After breakfast, he typically retired to his book-lined study to enjoy the precious hours of uninterrupted work before his doors opened to the outer world. The chair on which he sat was the same one he had used in the Governor's Mansion in Albany, designed specially for him so that everything he needed could be right at hand. It was, he joked, his "complete office," equipped not only with a writing arm that swiveled back and forth but also with a candleholder and secret drawers to keep his inkwells, pens, treasured snuff box, and the ashes of the half-dozen or more cigars he smoked every day. "He usually lighted a cigar when he sat down to write," Fred recalled, "slowly consuming it as his pen ran rapidly over the page, and lighted a fresh one when that was exhausted."

Midmorning of the day of the nomination, a large cannon was hauled

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from the Auburn Armory into the park. "The cannoneers were stationed at their posts," the local paper reported, "the fire lighted, the ammunition ready, and all waiting for the signal, to make the city and county echo to the joyful news" that was expected to unleash the most spectacular public celebration the city had ever known. People began gathering in front of Seward's house. As the hours passed, the crowds grew denser, spilling over into all the main streets of Auburn. The revelers were drawn from their homes in anticipation of the grand occasion and by the lovely spring weather, welcome after the severe, snowy winters Auburn endured that often isolated the small towns and cities of the region for days at a time. Visitors had come by horse and carriage from the surrounding villages, from Seneca Falls and Waterloo to the west, from Skaneateles to the east, from Weedsport to the north. Local restaurants had stocked up with food. Banners were being prepared, flags were set to be raised, and in the basement of the chief hotel, hundreds of bottles of champagne stood ready to be uncorked.

A festive air pervaded Auburn, for the vigorous senator was admired by almost everyone in the region, not only for his political courage, unquestioned integrity, and impressive intellect but even more for his good nature and his genial disposition. A natural politician, Seward was genuinely interested in people, curious about their families and the smallest details of their lives, anxious to help with their problems. As a public man he possessed unusual resilience, enabling him to accept criticism with good-humored serenity.

Even the Democratic paper, the *New York Herald*, conceded that probably fewer than a hundred of Auburn's ten thousand residents would vote against Seward if he received the nomination. "He is beloved by all classes of people, irrespective of partisan predilections," the *Herald* observed. "No philanthropic or benevolent movement is suggested without receiving his liberal and thoughtful assistance. . . . As a landlord he is kind and lenient; as an advisor he is frank and reliable; as a citizen he is enterprising and patriotic; as a champion of what he considers to be right he is dauntless and intrepid."

Seward customarily greeted personal friends at the door and was fond of walking them through his tree-lined garden to his white summerhouse. Though he stood only five feet six inches tall, with a slender frame that young Henry Adams likened to that of a scarecrow, he was nonetheless, Adams marveled, a commanding figure, an outsize personality, a "most glorious original" against whom larger men seemed smaller. People were drawn to this vital figure with the large, hawklike nose, bushy eyebrows, enormous ears; his hair, once bright red, had faded now to the color of

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straw. His step, in contrast to Lincoln's slow and laborious manner of walking, had a "school-boy elasticity" as he moved from his garden to his house and back again with what one reporter described as a "slashing swagger."

Every room of his palatial home contained associations from earlier days, mementos of previous triumphs. The slim Sheraton desk in the hallway had belonged to a member of the First Constitutional Congress in 1789. The fireplace in the parlor had been crafted by the young carpenter Brigham Young, later prophet of the Mormon Church. The large Thomas Cole painting in the drawing room depicting *Portage Falls* had been presented to Seward in commemoration of his early efforts to extend the canal system in New York State. Every inch of wall space was filled with curios and family portraits executed by the most famous artists of the day—Thomas Sully, Chester Harding, Henry Inman. Even the ivy that grew along the pathways and up the garden trellises had an anecdotal legacy, having been cultivated at Sir Walter Scott's home in Scotland and presented to Seward by Washington Irving.

As he perused the stack of telegrams and newspaper articles arriving from Chicago for the past week, Seward had every reason to be confident. Both Republican and Democratic papers agreed that "the honor in question was [to be] awarded by common expectation to the distinguished Senator from the State of New York, who, more than any other, was held to be the representative man of his party, and who, by his commanding talents and eminent public services, has so largely contributed to the development of its principles." The local Democratic paper, the Albany *Atlas and Argus*, was forced to concede: "No press has opposed more consistently and more unreservedly than ours the political principles of Mr. Seward. . . . But we have recognised the genius and the leadership of the man."

So certain was Seward of receiving the nomination that the weekend before the convention opened he had already composed a first draft of the valedictory speech he expected to make to the Senate, assuming that he would resign his position as soon as the decision in Chicago was made. Taking leave of his Senate colleagues, with whom he had labored through the tumultuous fifties, he had returned to Auburn, the place, he once said, he loved and admired more than any other—more than Albany, where he had served four years in the state senate and two terms as governor as a member of the Whig Party; more than the U.S. Senate chamber, where he had represented the leading state of the Union for nearly twelve years; more than any city in any of the four continents in which he had traveled extensively.

Auburn was the only place, he claimed, where he was left "free to act in an individual and not in a representative and public character," the only

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place where he felt "content to live, and content, when life's fitful fever shall be over, to die." Auburn was a prosperous community in the 1860s, with six schoolhouses, thirteen churches, seven banks, eleven newspapers, a woolen mill, a candle factory, a state prison, a fine hotel, and more than two hundred stores. Living on the northern shore of Owasco Lake, seventy-eight miles east of Rochester, the citizens took pride in the orderly layout of its streets, adorned by handsome rows of maples, elms, poplars, and sycamores.

Seward had arrived in Auburn as a graduate of Union College in Schenectady, New York. Having completed his degree with highest honors and finished his training for the bar, he had come to practice law with Judge Elijah Miller, the leading citizen of Cayuga County. It was in Judge Miller's country house that Seward had courted and married Frances Miller, the judge's intelligent, well-educated daughter. Frances was a tall, slender, comely woman, with large black eyes, an elegant neck, and a passionate commitment to women's rights and the antislavery cause. She was Seward's intellectual equal, a devoted wife and mother, a calming presence in his stormy life. In this same house, where he and Frances had lived since their marriage, five children were born—Augustus, a graduate of West Point who was now serving in the military; Frederick, who had embarked on a career in journalism and served as his father's private secretary in Washington; Will Junior, who was just starting out in business; and Fanny, a serious-minded girl on the threshold of womanhood, who loved poetry, read widely, kept a daily journal, and hoped someday to be a writer. A second daughter, Cornelia, had died in 1837 at four months.

Seward had been slow to take up the Republican banner, finding it difficult to abandon his beloved Whig Party. His national prominence ensured that he became the new party's chief spokesman the moment he joined its ranks. Seward, Henry Adams wrote, "would inspire a cow with statesmanship if she understood our language." The young Republican leader Carl Schurz later recalled that he and his friends idealized Seward and considered him the "leader of the political anti-slavery movement. From him we received the battle-cry in the turmoil of the contest, for he was one of those spirits who sometimes will go ahead of public opinion instead of tamely following its footprints."

In a time when words, communicated directly and then repeated in newspapers, were the primary means of communication between a political leader and the public, Seward's ability to "compress into a single sentence, a single word, the whole issue of a controversy" would irrevocably, and often dangerously, create a political identity. Over the years, his ringing phrases, calling upon a "higher law" than the Constitution that com-

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manded men to freedom, or the assertion that the collision between the North and South was "an irrepressible conflict," became, as the young Schurz noted, "the inscriptions on our banners, the pass-words of our combatants." But those same phrases had also alarmed Republican moderates, especially in the West. It was rhetoric, more than substance, that had stamped Seward as a radical—for his actual positions in 1860 were not far from the center of the Republican Party.

Whenever Seward delivered a major speech in the Senate, the galleries were full, for audiences were invariably transfixed not only by the power of his arguments but by his exuberant personality and, not least, the striking peculiarity of his appearance. Forgoing the simpler style of men's clothing that prevailed in the 1850s, Seward preferred pantaloons and a long-tailed frock coat, the tip of a handkerchief poking out its back pocket. This jaunty touch figured in his oratorical style, which included dramatic pauses for him to dip into his snuff box and blow his enormous nose into the outsize yellow silk handkerchief that matched his yellow pantaloons. Such flamboyance and celebrity almost lent an aura of inevitability to his nomination.

If Seward remained serene as the hours passed to afternoon, secure in the belief that he was about to realize the goal toward which he had bent his formidable powers for so many years, the chief reason for his tranquillity lay in the knowledge that his campaign at the convention was in the hands of the most powerful political boss in the country: Thurlow Weed. Dictator of New York State for nearly half a century, the handsome, white-haired Weed was Seward's closest friend and ally. "Men might love and respect [him], might hate and despise him," Weed's biographer Glyndon Van Deusen wrote, "but no one who took any interest in the politics and government of the country could ignore him." Over the years, it was Weed who managed every one of Seward's successful campaigns—for the state senate, the governorship, and the senatorship of New York—guarding his career at every step along the way "as a hen does its chicks."

They made an exceptional team. Seward was more visionary, more idealistic, better equipped to arouse the emotions of a crowd; Weed was more practical, more realistic, more skilled in winning elections and getting things done. While Seward conceived party platforms and articulated broad principles, Weed built the party organization, dispensed patronage, rewarded loyalists, punished defectors, developed poll lists, and carried voters to the polls, spreading the influence of the boss over the entire state. So closely did people identify the two men that they spoke of Seward-Weed as a single political person: "Seward is Weed and Weed is Seward."

Thurlow Weed certainly understood that Seward would face a host of

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problems at the convention. There were many delegates who considered the New Yorker too radical; others disdained him as an opportunist, shifting ground to strengthen his own ambition. Furthermore, complaints of corruption had surfaced in the Weed-controlled legislature. And the very fact that Seward had been the most conspicuous Northern politician for nearly a decade inevitably created jealousy among many of his colleagues. Despite these problems, Seward nonetheless appeared to be the overwhelming choice of Republican voters and politicians.

Moreover, since Weed believed the opposition lacked the power to consolidate its strength, he was convinced that Seward would eventually emerge the victor. Members of the vital New York State delegation confirmed Weed's assessment. On May 16, the day the convention opened, the former Whig editor, now a Republican, James Watson Webb assured Seward that there was "no *cause* for doubting. It is only a question of time. . . . And I tell you, and stake my judgment upon it entirely, that nothing has, or can occur . . . to shake my convictions in regard to the result." The next day, Congressman Eldridge Spaulding telegraphed Seward: "Your friends are firm and confident that you will be nominated after a few ballots." And on the morning of the 18th, just before the balloting was set to begin, William Evarts, chairman of the New York delegation, sent an optimistic message: "All right. Everything indicates your nomination today sure." The dream that had powered Seward and Weed for three decades seemed within reach at last.

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WHILE FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS gathered about Seward on the morning of the 18th, Ohio's governor, Salmon Chase, awaited the balloting results in characteristic solitude. History records no visitors that day to the majestic Gothic mansion bristling with towers, turrets, and chimneys at the corner of State and Sixth Streets in Columbus, Ohio, where the handsome fifty-two-year-old widower lived with his two daughters, nineteen-year-old Kate and her half sister, eleven-year-old Nettie.

There are no reports of crowds gathering spontaneously in the streets as the hours passed, though preparations had been made for a great celebration that evening should Ohio's favorite son receive the nomination he passionately believed he had a right to expect. Brass bands stood at the ready. Fireworks had been purchased, and a dray procured to drag an enormous cannon to the statehouse, where its thunder might roll over the city once the hoped-for results were revealed. Until that announcement, the citizens of Columbus apparently went about their business, in keeping with the reserved, even austere, demeanor of their governor.

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Chase stood over six feet in height. His wide shoulders, massive chest, and dignified bearing all contributed to Carl Schurz's assessment that Chase "looked as you would wish a statesman to look." One reporter observed that "he is one of the finest specimens of a perfect man that we have ever seen; a large, well formed head, set upon a frame of herculean proportions," with "an eye of unrivaled splendor and brilliancy." Yet where Lincoln's features became more warm and compelling as one drew near him, the closer one studied Chase's good-looking face, the more one noticed the unattractive droop of the lid of his right eye, creating "an arresting duality, as if two men, rather than one, looked out upon the world."

Fully aware of the positive first impression he created, Chase dressed with meticulous care. In contrast to Seward or Lincoln, who were known to greet visitors clad in slippers with their shirttails hanging out, the dignified Chase was rarely seen without a waistcoat. Nor was he willing to wear his glasses in public, though he was so nearsighted that he would often pass friends on the street without displaying the slightest recognition.

An intensely religious man of unbending routine, Chase likely began that day, as he began every day, gathering his two daughters and all the members of his household staff around him for a solemn reading of Scripture. The morning meal done, he and his elder daughter, Kate, would repair to the library to read and discuss the morning papers, searching together for signs that people across the country regarded Chase as highly as he regarded himself—signs that would bolster their hope for the Republican nomination.

During his years as governor, he kept to a rigid schedule, setting out at the same time each morning for the three-block walk to the statehouse, which was usually his only exercise of the day. Never late for appointments, he had no patience with the sin of tardiness, which robbed precious minutes of life from the person who was kept waiting. On those evenings when he had no public functions to attend, he would sequester himself in his library at home to answer letters, consult the statute books, memorize lines of poetry, study a foreign language, or practice the jokes that, however hard he tried, he could never gracefully deliver.

On the rare nights when he indulged in a game of backgammon or chess with Kate, he would invariably return to work at his fastidiously arranged drop-leaf desk, where everything was always in its "proper place" with not a single pen or piece of paper out of order. There he would sit for hours, long after every window on his street was dark, recording his thoughts in the introspective diary he had kept since he was twenty years old. Then, as the candle began to sink, he would turn to his Bible to close the day as it had begun, with prayer.

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Unlike Seward's Auburn estate, which he and Frances had furnished over the decades with objects that marked different stages of their lives, Chase had filled his palatial house with exquisite carpets, carved parlor chairs, elegant mirrors, and rich draperies that important people of his time *ought* to display to prove their eminence to the world at large. He had moved frequently during his life, and this Columbus dwelling was the first home he had really tried to make his own. Yet everything was chosen for effect: even the dogs, it was said, seemed "designed and posed."

Columbus was a bustling capital city in 1860, with a population of just under twenty thousand and a reputation for gracious living and hospitable entertainment. The city's early settlers had hailed largely from New England, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, but in recent decades German and Irish immigrants had moved in, along with a thousand free blacks who lived primarily in the Long Street district near the Irish settlement. It was a time of steady growth and prosperity. Spacious blocks with wide shade trees were laid out in the heart of the city, where, the writer William Dean Howells recalled, beautiful young women, dressed in great hoopskirts, floated by "as silken balloons walking in the streets." Fashionable districts developed along High and State Streets, and a new Capitol, nearly as big as the United States Capitol, opened its doors in January 1857. Built in Greek Revival style, with tall Doric columns defining each of the entrances and a large cupola on top, the magnificent structure, which housed the governor's office as well as the legislative chambers, was proclaimed to be "the greatest State capitol building" in the country.

Unlike Seward, who frequently attended theater, loved reading novels, and found nothing more agreeable than an evening of cards, fine cigars, and a bottle of port, Chase neither drank nor smoked. He considered both theater and novels a foolish waste of time and recoiled from all games of chance, believing that they unwholesomely excited the mind. Nor was he likely to regale his friends with intricate stories told for pure fun, as did Lincoln. As one contemporary noted, "he seldom told a story without spoiling it." Even those who knew him well, except perhaps his beloved Kate, rarely recalled his laughing aloud.

Kate Chase, beautiful and ambitious, filled the emotional void in her father's heart created by the almost incomprehensible loss of three wives, all having died at a young age, including Kate's mother when Kate was five years old. Left on his own, Chase had molded and shaped his brilliant daughter, watching over her growth and cultivation with a boundless ardor. When she was seven, he sent her to an expensive boarding school in Gramercy Park, New York, where she remained for ten years, studying Latin, French, history, and the classics, in addition to elocution, deport-

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ment, and the social graces. "In a few years you will necessarily go into society," he had told her when she was thirteen. "I desire that you may be qualified to ornament any society in our own country or elsewhere into which I may have occasion to take you. It is for this reason that I care more for your improvement in your studies, the cultivation of your manners, and the establishment of your moral & religious principles, than for anything else."

After Kate graduated from boarding school and returned to Columbus, she blossomed as Ohio's first lady. Her father's ambitions and dreams became the ruling passions of her life. She gradually made herself absolutely essential to him, helping with his correspondence, editing his speeches, discussing political strategy, entertaining his friends and colleagues. While other girls her age focused on the social calendar of balls and soirées, she concentrated all her energies on furthering her father's political career. "She did everything in her power," her biographers suggest, "to fill the gaps in his life so that he would not in his loneliness seek another Mrs. Chase." She sat beside him at lyceum lectures and political debates. She presided over his dinners and receptions. She became his surrogate wife.

Though Chase treated his sweet, unassuming younger daughter, Janette (Nettie), with warmth and affection, his love for Kate was powerfully intertwined with his desire for political advancement. He had cultivated her in his own image, and she possessed an ease of conversation far more relaxed than his own. Now he could depend on her to assist him every step along the way as, day after day, year after year, he moved steadily toward his goal of becoming president. From the moment when the high office appeared possible to Chase, with his stunning election in 1855 as the first Republican governor of a major state, it had become the consuming passion of both father and daughter that he reach the White House—a passion that would endure even after the Civil War was over. Seward was no less ambitious, but he was far more at ease with diverse people, and more capable of discarding the burdens of office at the end of the day.

Yet if Chase was somewhat priggish and more self-righteous than Seward, he was more inflexibly attached to his guiding principles, which, for more than a quarter of a century, had encompassed an unflagging commitment to the cause of the black man. Whereas the more accommodating Seward could have been a successful politician in almost any age, Chase functioned best in an era when dramatic moral issues prevailed. The slavery debate of the antebellum period allowed Chase to argue his antislavery principles in biblical terms of right and wrong. Chase was actually more radical than Seward on the slavery issue, but because his speeches were not studded with memorable turns of phrase, his positions were not as notori-

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ous in the country at large, and, therefore, not as damaging in more moderate circles.

"There may have been abler statesmen than Chase, and there certainly were more agreeable companions," his biographer Albert Hart has asserted, "but none of them contributed so much to the stock of American political ideas as he." In his study of the origins of the Republican Party, William Gienapp underscores this judgment. "In the long run," he concludes, referring both to Chase's intellectual leadership of the antislavery movement and to his organizational abilities, "no individual made a more significant contribution to the formation of the Republican party than did Chase."

And no individual felt he *deserved* the presidency as a natural result of his past contributions more than Chase himself. Writing to his longtime friend the abolitionist Gamaliel Bailey, he claimed: "A very large body of the people—embracing not a few who would hardly vote for any man other than myself as a Republican nominee—seem to desire that I shall be a candidate in 1860. No effort of mine, and so far as I know none of my immediate personal friends has produced this feeling. It seems to be of spontaneous growth."

A vivid testimony to the power of the governor's wishful thinking is provided by Carl Schurz, Seward's avid supporter, who was invited to stay with Chase while lecturing in Ohio in March 1860. "I arrived early in the morning," Schurz recalled in his memoirs, "and was, to my great surprise, received at the uncomfortable hour by the Governor himself, and taken to the breakfast room." Kate entered, greeted him, "and then let herself down upon her chair with the graceful lightness of a bird that, folding its wings, perches upon the branch of a tree. . . . She had something imperial in the pose of the head, and all her movements possessed an exquisite natural charm. No wonder that she came to be admired as a great beauty and broke many hearts."

The conversation, in which "Miss Kate took a lively and remarkably intelligent part, soon turned upon politics," as Chase revealed to Schurz with surprising candor his "ardent desire to be President of the United States." Aware that Schurz would be a delegate at the convention, Chase sounded him on his own candidacy. "It would have given me a moment of sincerest happiness could I have answered that question with a note of encouragement, for nothing could have appeared to me more legitimate than the high ambition of that man," Schurz recalled. Chagrined, he nonetheless felt compelled to give an honest judgment, predicting that if the delegates were willing to nominate "an advanced anti-slavery man," they would take Seward before Chase.

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Chase was taken aback, "as if he had heard something unexpected." A look of sadness came over his face. Quickly he regained control and proceeded to deliver a powerful brief demonstrating why he, rather than Seward, deserved to be considered the true leader of the antislavery forces. Schurz remained unconvinced, but he listened politely, certain that he had never before met a public man with such a serious case of "presidential fever," to the extent of "honestly believing that he owed it to the country and that the country owed it to him that he should be President." For his part, Chase remained hopeful that by his own unwavering self-confidence he had cast a spell on Schurz. The following day, Chase told his friend Robert Hosea about the visit, suggesting that in the hours they spent together Schurz had seemed to alter his opinion of Chase's chance at winning, making it "desirable to have him brought in contact with our best men." Despite Chase's best efforts Schurz remained loyal to Seward.

In the weeks before the convention, the Chase candidacy received almost daily encouragement in the *Ohio State Journal*, the Republican newspaper in Columbus. "No man in the country is more worthy, no one is more competent," the *Journal* declared. By "steady devotion to the principles of popular freedom, through a long political career," he "has won the confidence and attachment of the people in regions far beyond the State."

Certain that his cause would ultimately triumph, Chase refused to engage in the practical methods by which nominations are won. He had virtually no campaign. He had not conciliated his many enemies in Ohio itself, and as a result, he alone among the candidates would not come to the convention with the united support of his own state. Remaining in his Columbus mansion with Kate by his side, he preferred to make inroads by reminding his supporters in dozens of letters that he was the best man for the job. Listening only to what he wanted to hear, discounting troubling signs, Chase believed that "if the most cherished wishes of the people could prevail," he would be the nominee.

"Now is the time," one supporter told him. "You will ride triumphantly on the topmost wave." On the eve of the convention, he remained buoyant. "There is reason to hope," he told James Briggs, a lawyer from Cleveland—reason to hope that he and Kate would soon take their place as the president and first lady of the United States.

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Judge Edward Bates awaited news from the convention at Grape Hill, his large country estate four miles from the city of St. Louis. Julia Coalter, his wife of thirty-seven years, was by his side. She was an attractive, sturdy

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woman who had borne him seventeen children, eight of whom survived to adulthood. Their extended family of six sons, two daughters, and nearly a dozen grandchildren remained unusually close. As the children married and raised families of their own, they continued to consider Grape Hill their primary home.

The judge's orderly life was steeped in solid rituals based on the seasons, the land, and his beloved family. He bathed in cold water every morning. A supper bell called him to eat every night. In the first week of April, he "substituted cotton for wollen socks, and a single breasted satin waistcoat for a double-breasted velvet." In July and August, he would monitor the progress of his potatoes, cabbage, squash, beets, and sweet corn. In the fall he would harvest his grape arbors. On New Year's Day, the Bates family followed an old country custom whereby the women remained home all day greeting visitors, while the men rode together from one house or farm to the next, paying calls on friends.

At sixty-six, Bates was among the oldest and best-loved citizens of St. Louis. In 1814, when he first ventured to the thriving city, it was a small fur trading village with a scattering of primitive cabins and a single ramshackle church. Four decades later, St. Louis boasted a population of 160,000 residents, and its infrastructure had boomed to include multiple churches, an extensive private and public educational system, numerous hospitals, and a variety of cultural facilities. The ever-increasing prosperity of the city, writes a historian of St. Louis, "led to the building of massive, ornate private homes equipped with libraries, ballrooms, conservatories, European paintings and sculpture."

Over the years, Bates had held a variety of respected offices—delegate to the convention that had drafted the first constitution of the state, member of the state legislature, representative to the U.S. congress, and judge of the St. Louis Land Court. His ambitions for political success, however, had been gradually displaced by love for his wife and large family. Though he had been asked repeatedly during the previous twenty years since his withdrawal from public life to run or once again accept high government posts, he consistently declined the offers.

Described by the portrait artist Alban Jasper Conant as "the quaintest looking character that walked the streets," Bates still wore "the old-fashioned Quaker clothes that had never varied in cut since he left his Virginia birthplace as a youth of twenty." He stood five feet seven inches tall, with a strong chin, heavy brows, thick hair that remained black until the end of his life, and a full white beard. In later years, Lincoln noted the striking contrast between Bates's black hair and white beard and teasingly suggested it was because Bates talked more than he thought, using "his

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chin more than his head." Julia Bates was also plain in her dress, "unaffected by the crinolines and other extravagances of the day, preferring a clinging skirt, a deep-pointed fichu called a Van Dyck, and a close-fitting little bonnet."

"How happy is my lot!" Bates recorded in his diary in the 1850s. "Blessed with a wife & children who spontaneously do all they can to make me comfortable, anticipating my wishes, even in the little matter of personal convenience, as if their happiness wholly depended on mine. O! it is a pleasure to work for such a family, to enjoy with them the blessings that God so freely gives." He found his legal work rewarding and intellectually stimulating, reveled in his position as an elder in the Presbyterian Church, and loved nothing more than to while away the long winter nights in his treasured library.

In contrast to Seward, whose restless energy found insufficient outlet in the bosom of his family, and to Chase, plagued all his days by unattained ambition, Bates experienced a passionate joy in the present, content to call himself "a very domestic, home, man." He had come briefly to national attention in 1847, when he delivered a spellbinding speech at the great River and Harbor Convention in Chicago, organized to protest President Polk's veto of a Whig-sponsored bill to provide federal appropriations for the internal improvement of rivers and harbors, especially needed in the fast-growing West. For a short time after the convention, newspapers across the country heralded Bates as a leading prospect for high political office, but he refused to take the bait. Thus, as the 1860 election neared, he assumed that, like his youth and early manhood, his old ambitions for political office had long since passed him by.

In this assumption, he was mistaken. Thirteen months before the Chicago convention, at a dinner hosted by Missouri congressman Frank Blair, Bates was approached to run for president by a formidable political group spearheaded by Frank's father, Francis Preston Blair, Sr. At sixty-six, the elder Blair had been a powerful player in Washington for decades. A Democrat most of his life, he had arrived in Washington from Kentucky during Andrew Jackson's first presidential term to publish the Democratic organ, the *Globe* newspaper. Blair soon became one of Jackson's most trusted advisers, a member of the famous "kitchen cabinet." Meetings were often held in the "Blair House," the stately brick mansion opposite the White House where Blair lived with his wife and four children. (Still known as the Blair House, the elegant dwelling is now owned by the government, serving as the president's official guesthouse.) To the lonely Jackson, whose wife had recently died, the Blairs became a surrogate family. The three Blair boys—James, Montgomery, and Frank Junior—had the run of the

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White House, while Elizabeth, the only girl, actually lived in the family quarters for months at a time and Jackson doted on her as if she were his own child. Indeed, decades later, when Jackson neared death, he called Elizabeth to his home in Tennessee and gave her his wife's wedding ring, which he had worn on his watch chain from the day of her death.

Blair Senior had broken with the Democrats after the Mexican War over the extension of slavery into the territories. Although born and bred in the South, and still a slaveowner himself, he had become convinced that slavery must not be extended beyond where it already existed. He was one of the first important political figures to call for the founding of the Republican Party. At a Christmas dinner on his country estate in Silver Spring, Maryland, in 1855, he instigated plans for the first Republican Convention in Philadelphia that following summer.

Over the years, Blair's Silver Spring estate, just across the District of Columbia boundary, had become a natural gathering place for politicians and journalists. The house was situated amid hundreds of rolling acres surrounded by orchards, brooks, even a series of grottoes. From the "Big Gate" at the entrance, the carriage roadway passed through a forest of pine and poplar, opening to reveal a long driveway winding between two rows of chestnut trees and over a rustic bridge to the main house. In the years ahead, the Blairs' Silver Spring estate would become one of Lincoln's favorite places to relax.

The group that Blair convened included his two accomplished sons, Montgomery and Frank; an Indiana congressman, Schuyler Colfax, who would later become vice president under Ulysses Grant; and Charles Gibson, one of Bates's oldest friends in Missouri. Montgomery Blair, tall, thin, and scholarly, had graduated from West Point before studying law and moving to Missouri. In the 1850s he had returned to Washington to be closer to his parents. He took up residence in his family's city mansion on Pennsylvania Avenue. In the nation's capital, Monty Blair developed a successful legal practice and achieved national fame when he represented the slave Dred Scott in his bid for freedom.

Monty's charismatic younger brother Frank, recently elected to Congress, was a natural politician. Strikingly good-looking, with reddish-brown hair, a long red mustache, high cheekbones, and bright gray eyes, Frank was the one on whom the Blair family's burning ambitions rested. Both his father and older brother harbored dreams that Frank would one day become president. But in 1860, Frank was only in his thirties, and in the meantime, the Blair family turned its powerful gaze on Edward Bates.

The Blairs had settled on the widely respected judge, a longtime Whig and former slaveholder who had emancipated his slaves and become a

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Free-Soiler, as the ideal candidate for a conservative national ticket opposed to both the radical abolitionists in the North and the proslavery fanatics in the South. Though he had never officially joined the Republican Party, Bates held fast to the cardinal principle of Republicanism: that slavery must be restricted to the states where it already existed, and that it must be prevented from expanding into the territories.

As a man of the West and a peacemaker by nature, Bates was just the person, Blair Senior believed, to unite old-line Whigs, antislavery Democrats, and liberal nativists in a victorious fight against the Southern Democratic slaveocracy. The fact that Bates had receded from the political scene for decades was an advantage, leaving him untainted by the contentious battles of the fifties. He alone, his supporters believed, could quell the threats of secession and civil war and return the nation to peace, progress, and prosperity.

Unsurprisingly, Bates was initially reluctant to allow his name to be put forward as a candidate for president. "I feel, tho' in perfect bodily health, an indolence and indecision not common with me," he conceded in July 1859. "The cause, I fear, is the mixing up of my name in Politics. . . . A large section of the Republican party, who think that Mr. Seward's nomination would ensure defeat, are anxious to take me up, thinking that I could carry the Whigs and Americans generally. . . . I must try to resist the temptation, and not allow my thoughts to be drawn off from the common channels of business and domestic cares. Ambition is a passion, at once strong and insidious, and is very apt to cheet a man out of his happiness and his true respectability of character."

Gradually, however, as letters and newspaper editorials advocating his candidacy crowded in upon him, a desire for the highest office in the land took command of his nature. The office to which he heard the call was not, as he had once disdained, "a mere seat in Congress as a subaltern member," but the presidency of the United States. Six months after the would-be kingmakers had approached him, Frank Blair, Jr., noted approvingly that "the mania has bitten old Bates very seriously," and predicted he would "play out more boldly for it than he has heretofore done."

By the dawn of the new year, 1860, thoughts of the White House monopolized the entries Bates penned in his diary, crowding out his previous observations on the phases of the moon and the state of his garden. "My nomination for the Presidency, which at first struck me with mere wonder, has become familiar, and now I begin to think my prospects very fair," he recorded on January 9, 1860. "Circumstances seem to be remarkably concurrent in my favor, and there is now great probability that the Opposition of all classes will unite upon me: And that will be equivalent to election. . . .

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Can it be reserved for me to defeat and put down that corrupt and dangerous party [the Democratic Party]? Truly, if I can do my country that much good, I will rejoice in the belief that I have not lived in vain."

In the weeks that followed, his days were increasingly taken up with politics. Though he did not enjoy formal dinner parties, preferring intimate suppers with his family and a few close friends, Bates now spent more time than ever before entertaining political friends, educators, and newspaper editors. Although still tending to his garden, he immersed himself in periodicals on politics, economics, and public affairs. He felt he should prepare himself intellectually for the task of presidential leadership by reading historical accounts of Europe's most powerful monarchs, as well as theoretical works on government. He sought guidance for his role as chief executive in Carlyle's *Frederick the Great* and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Evenings once devoted to family were now committed to public speeches and correspondence with supporters. Politics had fastened a powerful hold upon him, disrupting his previous existence.

The chance for his nomination depended, as was true for Chase and Lincoln as well, on Seward's failure to achieve a first ballot victory at the convention. "I have many strong assurances that I stand second," Bates confided in his diary, "first in the Northwest and in some states in New England, second in New York, Pa." To be sure, there were pockets of opposition, particularly among the more passionate Republicans, who argued that the party must nominate one of its own, and among the German-Americans, who recalled that Bates had endorsed Millard Fillmore when he ran for president on the anti-immigrant American Party four years earlier. As the convention approached, however, his supporters were increasingly optimistic.

"There is no question," the *New York Tribune* predicted, "as there has been none for these three months past, that [Bates] will have more votes in the Convention than any other candidate presented by those who think it wiser to nominate a man of moderate and conservative antecedents." As the delegates gathered in Chicago, Francis Blair, Sr., prophesied that Bates would triumph in Chicago.

Though Bates acknowledged he had never officially joined the Republican Party, he understood that many Republicans, including "some of the most moderate and patriotic" men, believed that his nomination "would tend to soften the tone of the Republican party, without any abandonment of its principles," thus winning "the friendship and support of many, especially in the border States." His chances of success looked good. How strangely it had all turned out, for surely he understood that he had followed an unusual public path, a path that had curved swiftly upward when

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he was young, then leveled off, even sloped downward for many years. But now, as he positioned himself to reenter politics, he sighted what appeared to be a relatively clear trail all the way to the very top.

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On that morning of May 18, 1860, Bates's chief objective was simply to stop Seward on the first ballot. Chase, too, had his eye on the frontrunner, while Seward worried about Chase. Bates had become convinced that the convention would turn to him as the only real moderate. Neither Seward nor Chase nor Bates seriously considered Lincoln an obstacle to their great ambition.

Lincoln was not a complete unknown to his rivals. By 1860, his path had crossed with each of them in different ways. Seward had met Lincoln twelve years before at a political meeting. The two shared lodging that night, and Seward encouraged Lincoln to clarify and intensify his moderate position on slavery. Lincoln had met Bates briefly, and had sat in the audience in 1847 when Bates delivered his mesmerizing speech at the River and Harbor Convention. Chase had campaigned for Lincoln and the Republicans in Illinois in 1858, though the two men had never met.

There was little to lead one to suppose that Abraham Lincoln, nervously rambling the streets of Springfield that May morning, who scarcely had a national reputation, certainly nothing to equal any of the other three, who had served but a single term in Congress, twice lost bids for the Senate, and had no administrative experience whatsoever, would become the greatest historical figure of the nineteenth century.

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CHAPTER 2

THE "LONGING TO RISE"

Abraham Lincoln, William Henry Seward, Salmon Chase, and Edward Bates were members of a restless generation of Americans, destined to leave behind the eighteenth-century world of their fathers. Bates, the oldest, was born when George Washington was still president; Seward and Chase during Jefferson's administration; Lincoln shortly before James Madison took over. Thousands of miles separate their birthplaces in Virginia, New York, New Hampshire, and Kentucky. Nonetheless, social and economic forces shaped their paths with marked similarities. Despite striking differences in station, talent, and temperament, all four aspirants for the Republican nomination left home, journeyed west, studied law, dedicated themselves to public service, joined the Whig Party, developed a reputation for oratorical eloquence, and became staunch opponents of the spread of slavery.

It was a country for young men. "We find ourselves," the twenty-eight-year-old Lincoln told the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, "in the peaceful possession, of the fairest portion of the earth, as regards extent of territory, fertility of soil, and salubrity of climate." The founding fathers had crafted a government more favorable to liberty "than any of which the history of former times tells us." Now it was up to their children to preserve and expand the great experiment.

The years following the Revolution fostered the belief that the only barriers to success were discipline and the extent of one's talents. "When both the privileges and the disqualifications of class have been abolished and men have shattered the bonds which once held them immobile," marveled the French visitor Alexis de Tocqueville, "the idea of progress comes naturally into each man's mind; the desire to rise swells in every heart at once, and all men want to quit their former social position. Ambition becomes a universal feeling."

The same observation that horrified Mrs. Frances Trollope on a visit to

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America, that "any man's son may become the equal of any other man's son," propelled thousands of young men to break away from the small towns and limited opportunities their fathers had known. These ambitious youngsters ventured forth to test their luck in new careers as merchants, manufacturers, teachers, and lawyers. In the process, hundreds of new towns and cities were born, and with the rapid expansion of roads, bridges, and canals, a modern market economy emerged. Vast new lands and possibilities were opened when the Louisiana Purchase doubled the extent of America's territorial holdings overnight.

The newly liberated Americans crossed the Appalachian Mountains, which had separated the original colonies from the unsettled West. "Americans are always moving on," wrote Stephen Vincent Benét. "The stream uncrossed, the promise still untried/The metal sleeping in the mountainside." In the South, pioneers moved through the Gulf States toward the Mississippi River, extending cotton cultivation and slavery as they went. In the North, the movement west from New England and the mid-Atlantic brought settlers who created a patchwork of family farms and planted the seeds of thriving cities.

Bates traveled farthest, eight hundred miles from his home state of Virginia across Kentucky, Illinois, and Indiana to the young city of St. Louis in the newly established territory of Missouri. Chase made the arduous journey from New Hampshire to Cincinnati, Ohio, a burgeoning city recently carved from a forest rich with wild game. Seward left his family in eastern New York for the growing city of Auburn in the western part of the state. Lincoln traveled from Kentucky to Indiana, and then on to Illinois, where he would become a flatboatman, merchant, surveyor, and postmaster before studying law.

"Every American is eaten up with longing to rise," Tocqueville wrote. These four men, and thousands more, were not searching for a mythical pot of gold at the edge of the western rainbow, but for a place where their dreams and efforts would carve them a place in a fast-changing society.

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OF THE CONTENDERS, William Henry Seward enjoyed the most privileged childhood. Blessed with a sanguine temperament that seemingly left him free from inner turmoil, he launched himself into every endeavor with unbounded vitality—whether competing for honors in school, playing cards with his classmates, imbibing good food and wine, or absorbing the pleasures of travel.

Henry Seward, as he would be called, was born on May 16, 1801. The fourth of six children, he grew up in the hill country of Orange County,

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New York, in the village of Florida, about twenty-five miles from West Point. His father, Samuel Seward, had accumulated "a considerable fortune" through his various employments as physician, magistrate, judge, merchant, land speculator, and member of the New York state legislature. His mother, Mary Jennings Seward, was renowned in the community for her warmth, good sense, and kindly manner.

Affectionate and outgoing, with red hair and intelligent blue eyes, Henry was singled out among his brothers for a college education, "then regarded, by every family," he later wrote, "as a privilege so high and so costly that not more than one son could expect it." His "destined preferment," as he called it, led him at the age of nine to a preparatory academy in the village of Goshen, and then back to his own town when a new academy opened its doors. His day of study began, he recalled, "at five in the morning, and closed at nine at night." The regime imposed by the schoolmaster was rigorous. When young Henry faltered in his translations of Caesar or failed to decipher lines of Virgil's poetry, he was relegated to a seat on the floor "with the classic in one hand and the dictionary in the other." Although sometimes the pressure was "more than [he] could bear," he persisted, knowing that his father would never accept failure.

After the isolated hours consumed by books, Henry delighted in the sociability of winter evenings, when, he recalled, "the visit of a neighbor brought out the apples, nuts, and cider, and I was indulged with a respite from study, and listened to conversation, which generally turned upon politics or religion!" His pleasure in these social gatherings left Seward with a lifelong memory and appetite. Years later, when he established his own home, he filled evenings with a continuous flow of guests, always providing abundant food, drink, and conversation.

The Sewards, like other well-to-do families in the area, owned slaves. As a small child, Henry spent much of his time in the slave quarters, comprised of the kitchen and the garret above it. Basking in the warmth of the fireplace and the aroma of the turkeys and chickens roasting on the spit, he savored the "loquacious" and "affectionate" company of the garret's residents. They provided a welcome respite from the "severe decorum" of his parents' parlor on the other side of the house. As he grew older, however, he found it difficult to accept the diminished status of these slave friends, whose lives were so different from his own.

Although his father, an exception in the village, permitted his slaves to join his own children in the local schoolhouse, Henry puzzled over why "no other black children went there." More disturbing still, he discovered that one of his companions, a slave child his own age who belonged to a

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neighboring family, was regularly whipped. After one severe beating, the boy ran away. "He was pursued and brought back," Seward recalled, and was forced to wear "an iron yoke around his neck, which exposed him to contempt and ridicule," until he finally "found means to break the collar, and fled forever." Seward later would credit this early unease and personal awareness of the slaves' plight for his resolve to fight against slavery.

The youthful Seward was not alone in his budding dislike for slavery. In the years after the Revolutionary War, the state legislatures in eleven Northern states passed abolition laws. Some states banned slavery outright within their boundaries; others provided for a system of gradual emancipation, decreeing that all slaves born after a certain date would be granted freedom when they attained adulthood. The slaves Seward knew as a child belonged to this transitional generation. By 1827, slavery would be fully eradicated in New York. While Northern legislatures were eliminating the institution, however, slavery had become increasingly important to the economic life of the cotton-growing South.

At fifteen, Seward enrolled in upstate New York's prestigious Union College. His first sight of the steamboat that carried him up the Hudson was one he would never forget. Invented only a decade earlier, the steamboat seemed to him "a magnificent palace . . . a prodigy of power." His first glimpse of Albany, then a rural village with a population of twelve thousand, thrilled him—"so vast, so splendid, so imposing." Throughout his life, Seward retained an awe of the new technologies and inventions that fostered the industrial development of his rapidly expanding country.

At Union, Seward's open, affable nature made him dozens of friends. Upon his arrival, he later confessed, "I cherished in my secret thoughts aspirations to become . . . the valedictorian of my class." When he realized that his competitors for the honor seemed isolated from the social life of the school, he wondered if the prize was worth the cost. His ambitions were revitalized, however, when the president of Union announced that the Phi Beta Kappa Society "had determined to establish a fourth branch at Union College," with membership conferred on the top scholars at the end of junior year. There were then only three active branches of Phi Beta Kappa—at Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth. To gain admission, Seward realized, would place him in the company of "all the eminent philosophers, scholars, and statesmen of the country."

He made a pact with his roommate whereby the two "rose at three o'clock in the morning, cooked and spread our own meals, washed our own dishes, and spent the whole time which we could save from prayers and recitations, and the table, in severe study, in which we unreservedly

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and constantly aided each other." Years later, his jovial self-confidence intact, Seward wrote: "Need I say that we entered the great society without encountering the deadly blackball?"

Seward began his senior year in good spirits. Without sacrificing his popularity with classmates, he was poised to graduate as valedictorian. But his prideful character temporarily derailed him. Strapped by the stingy allowance his father provided, he had fallen into debt with various creditors in Schenectady. The bills, mostly to tailors, were not large, but his father's refusal to pay spurred a rash decision to leave college for good, so that he might work to support himself. "I could not submit to the shame of credit impaired," he later wrote. Without notifying his parents, he accompanied a classmate to Georgia, where he found a good job teaching school. When his father discovered Henry's whereabouts, he "implored [him] to return," mingling promises of additional funds with threats that he would pursue the trustees of the school "with the utmost rigor of the law . . . if they should continue to harbor the delinquent."

If his father's threats increased his determination to stay, a letter from his mother, revealing "a broken heart," prompted Seward's return to New York. The following fall, after working off his debt that summer, he resumed his studies at Union. "Matters prosper in my favor," he wrote to a friend in January 1820, "and I have so far been inferior to none in my own opinion." He was back on track to become valedictorian, and his election as graduation speaker seemed likely. If denied the honor, he told his friend, "his soul would disdain to sit in the hearing of some, and listen to some whom he considers beneath even his notice." His goals were realized. He graduated first in his class and was unanimously elected by classmates and faculty to be Union College's commencement orator in June 1820.

From his honored place at Union College, Seward glided smoothly into the profession of law. In an era when "reading the law" under the guidance of an established attorney was the principal means of becoming a lawyer, he walked directly from his graduation ceremony to the law office of a distinguished Goshen lawyer, and then "was received as a student" in the New York City office of John Anthon, author of a widely known book on the legal practice. Not only did Seward have two eminent mentors, he also gained access to the "New York Forum," a society of ambitious law students who held mock trials and prosecutions to hone their professional skills before public audiences.

Accustomed to winning the highest honors, Seward was initially chagrined to discover that his legal arguments failed to bring the loudest applause. His confidence as a writer faltered until a fellow law student, whose orations "always carried away the audience," insisted that the problem was

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not Henry's compositions, which were, in fact, far superior to his own, but his husky voice, which a congenital inflammation in the throat rendered "incapable of free intonation." To prove this point, Seward's friend offered to exchange compositions, letting Seward read one of his while he read one of Seward's. Seward recalled that he read his friend's address "as well as I could, but it did not take at all. He followed me with my speech, and I think Broadway overheard the clamorous applause which arose on that occasion in Washington Hall."

During his stay in New York, Seward formed an intimate friendship with a bookish young man, David Berdan, who had graduated from Union the year after him. Seward believed that Berdan possessed "a genius of the highest order." He had read more extensively than anyone Seward knew and excelled as a scholar in the classics. "The domains of History, Eloquence, Poetry, Fiction & Song," Seward marveled, "were all subservient to his command." Berdan had entered into the study of law at the same office as Seward, but soon discovered that his vocation lay in writing, not law.

Together, the two young men attended the theater, read poetry, discussed books, and chased after women. Convinced that Berdan would become a celebrated writer, Seward stood in awe of his friend's talent and dedication. All such grand expectations and prospects were crushed when Berdan, still in his twenties, was "seized with a bleeding at the lungs" while sojourning in Europe. He continued traveling, but when his tuberculosis worsened, he booked his passage home, in "the hope that he might die in his native land." The illness took his life before the ship reached New York. His body was buried at sea. Seward was devastated, later telling his wife that he had loved Berdan as "never again" could he "love in this world."

Such intimate male attachments, as Seward's with Berdan, or, as we shall see, Lincoln's with Joshua Speed and Chase's with Edwin Stanton, were "a common feature of the social landscape" in nineteenth-century America, the historian E. Anthony Rotundo points out. The family-focused and community-centered life led by most men in the colonial era was transformed at the dawn of the new century into an individual and career-oriented existence. As the young men of Seward and Lincoln's generation left the familiarity of their small communities and traveled to seek employment in fast-growing, anonymous cities or in distant territories, they often felt unbearably lonely. In the absence of parents and siblings, they turned to one another for support, sharing thoughts and emotions so completely that their intimate friendships developed the qualities of passionate romances.

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After passing the bar examination, Seward explored the western part of the state, seeking the perfect law office from which to launch an illustrious career. He found what he wanted in Auburn when Judge Elijah Miller offered him a junior partnership in his thriving firm. Seward quickly assumed responsibility for most of the legal work passing through the office, earning the senior partner's trust and respect. The fifty-two-year-old judge was a widower who shared with his daughters—Lazette and Frances—the grandest residence in Auburn. It seemed to follow naturally that, less than two years later, Seward should woo and win Miller's twenty-year-old daughter, the beautiful, sensitive Frances. The judge insisted, as a condition of consent to the marriage, that the young couple join his household, which included his mother and unmarried sister.

Thus, at twenty-three, Seward found himself the tenant of the elegant country mansion where he and Frances would live for the rest of their lives. With a brilliant marriage and excellent prospects in his chosen profession, he could look ahead with confidence. To the end of his long life, he gazed optimistically to the future, believing that he and his countrymen were steadily advancing along a road toward increased knowledge, achievement, prosperity, and moral development.

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SALMON PORTLAND CHASE, in contrast to the ever buoyant Seward, possessed a restless soul incapable of finding satisfaction in his considerable achievements. He was forever brooding on a station in life not yet reached, recording at each turning point in his life his regret at not capitalizing on the opportunities given to him.

He was born in the rolling hills of Cornish, New Hampshire, in 1808, the eighth of eleven children. His ancestors had lived in the surrounding country for three generations, becoming pillars of the community. Chase would remember that "the neighboring folk used to say" of the substantial Chase homestead that "in that yellow house more brains were born than in any other house in New England." Three of his father's brothers attended Dartmouth College. One became a distinguished lawyer, another a U.S. senator, and the third an Episcopalian bishop.

Salmon's father, Ithamar Chase, was a successful farmer, a justice of the peace, and a representative from his district to the New Hampshire council. He was "a good man," Chase recalled, a kind father and a loving husband to his young wife, Janette Ralston. He governed his large family without a single "angry word or violent e[x]clamation from his lips." Chase long remembered a day when he was playing a game of ninepins with his friends. His father interrupted, saying he needed his son's help in the field.

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The boy hesitated. "Won't you come and help your father?" That was all that needed to be said. "Only a look. . . . All my reluctance vanished and I went with a right good will. He ruled by kind words & kind looks."

Young Salmon, like Seward, demonstrated an unusual intellectual precocity. His father singled him out to receive a better education "than that given to his other children." The boy thrived in the atmosphere of high expectations. "I was . . . ambitious to be at the head of my class," he recalled. During the summer months, his elder sister, Abigail, a schoolteacher in Cornish, kept him hard at work studying Latin grammar. If he failed to grasp his lessons, he would retreat to the garden and stay there by himself until he could successfully read the designated passages. At Sunday school, he strove to memorize more Bible verses than anyone else in his class, "once repeating accurately almost an entire gospel, in a single recitation." Eager to display his capacity, Chase would boast to adults that he enjoyed studying volumes of ancient history and perusing the plays of Shakespeare "for the entertainment they afforded."

While he was considered "quite a prodigy" in his written work, Chase was uneasy reciting in public. In contrast to Lincoln, who loved nothing better than to entertain his childhood friends and fellow students with stories, sermons, or passages from books, the self-conscious Chase was terrified to speak before fellow students, having "little notion of what I had to do or of the way to do it." With his "hands dangling and head down," he looked as awkward as he felt.

From his very early days, Chase showed signs of the fierce, ingrained rectitude that would both fortify his battle against slavery and incur the enmity of many among his fellows. Baptized Episcopalian in a pious family, where the Lord's day of rest was strictly kept, the young boy needed only one Sunday scolding for "sliding down hill with some boys on the dry pine leaves" to know that he would never "transgress that way again." Nor did he argue when his mother forbade association with boys who used profane language: he himself found it shocking that anyone would swear. Another indelible childhood memory made him abhor intemperance. He had stumbled upon the dead body of a drunken man in the street, his "face forward" in a pool of water "not deep enough to reach his ears," but sufficient, in his extreme state of intoxication, to drown him. The parish priest had delivered sermons on "the evils of intemperance," but, as Chase observed, "what sermon could rival in eloquence that awful spectacle of the dead drunkard—helplessly perishing where the slightest remnant of sense or strength would have sufficed to save."

When Chase was seven years old, his father made a bold business move. The War of 1812 had put a halt to glass imports from Europe, creating a

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pressing demand for new supplies. Sensing opportunity, Ithamar Chase liquidated his assets in Cornish to invest in a glass factory in the village of Keene. His wife had inherited some property there, including a fourteen-room tavern house. Chase moved his family into one section of the tavern and opened the rest to the public. While a curious and loquacious child like the young Lincoln might have enjoyed the convivial entertainments of a tavern, the reticent Salmon found the move from his country estate in Cornish unsettling. And for his father, the relocation proved calamitous. With the end of the war, tariff duties on foreign goods were reduced and glass imports saturated the market. The glass factory failed, sending him into bankruptcy.

The Chase family was unable to recover. Business failure led to humiliation in the community and, eventually, to loss of the family home. Ithamar Chase succumbed to a fatal stroke at the age of fifty-three, when Salmon was nine. "He lingered some days," Chase recalled. "He could not speak to us, and we stood mute and sobbing. Soon all was over. We had no father . . . the light was gone out from our home."

Left with heavy debts and meager resources, Janette Chase was forced to assume the burden of housing, educating, and providing for her numerous children on her own. Only by moving into cheap lodgings, and scrimping "almost to suffering," was she able to let Salmon, her brightest and most promising child, continue his studies at the local academy, fulfilling her promise to his "ever lamented and deceased father." When she could no longer make ends meet, she was forced to parcel her children out among relatives. Salmon was sent to study under the tutelage of his father's brother, the Episcopal bishop Philander Chase, who presided over a boys' school in Worthington in the newly formed state of Ohio. In addition to his work as an educator, Philander Chase was responsible for a sizable parish, and owned a farm that provided food and dairy products for the student body. Young Chase, in return for milking cows and driving them to pasture, building fires, and hauling wood, would be given room and board, and a classical and religious education.

In 1819, at the age of twelve, the boy traveled westward, first by wagon through Vermont and New York, then by steamboat across Lake Erie to Cleveland, a tiny lakeside settlement of a few hundred residents. There Salmon was stranded until a group of travelers passed through en route to Worthington. In the company of strangers, the child made his way on foot and horseback through a hundred miles of virgin forest to reach his uncle's home.

The bishop was an imposing figure, brilliant, ambitious, and hardworking. His faith, Chase observed, "was not passive but active. If any thing was

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to be done he felt that he must do it; and that, if he put forth all his energy, he might safely & cheerfully leave the event to Divine Providence." Certainty gave him an unbending zeal. He was "often very harsh & severe," recalled Chase, and "among us boys he was almost and sometimes, indeed, quite tyrannical." The most insignificant deviation from the daily regimen of prayer and study was met with a fearful combination of physical flogging and biblical precept.

"My memories of Worthington on the whole are not pleasant," Chase said of the time he spent with his domineering uncle. "There were some pleasant rambles—some pleasant incidents—some pleasant associates: but the disagreeable largely predominated. I used to count the days and wish I could get home or go somewhere else and get a living by work." One incident long remained in Chase's memory. As punishment for some infraction of the daily rules, he was ordered to bring in a large stack of wood before daybreak. He completed the task but complained to a fellow student that his uncle was "a darned old tyrant." Upon hearing these words, the bishop allowed no one to speak to the boy and forbade him to speak until he confessed and apologized. Days later, Chase finally recanted, and the sentence was revoked. "Even now," Chase said, telling the story decades later, "I almost wish I had not."

When the bishop was made president of Cincinnati College, Chase accompanied his uncle to Cincinnati. At thirteen, he was enrolled as a freshman at the college. The course of study was not difficult, leaving boys time to indulge in "a good deal of mischief & fun." Salmon Chase was not among them. "I had little or nothing to do with these sports," he recalled. "I had the chores to do at home, & when I had time I gave it to reading." Even Chase's sympathetic biographer Robert Warden observed that his "life might have been happier" had he "studied less and had more fun!" These early years witnessed the development of the rigid, self-denying habits that, throughout his life, prevented Chase from fully enjoying the companionship of others.

When Chase turned fifteen, his uncle left for England to secure funding for the new theological seminary that would become Kenyon College. At last, Chase was allowed to return to his mother's home in Keene, New Hampshire, where he planned to teach while preparing for admittance to Dartmouth College. His first position lasted only weeks, however. Employing the harsh methods of his uncle rather than the gentle precepts of his father, he administered corporal punishment to discipline his students. When irate parents complained, he was dismissed.

When Chase made his application to Dartmouth, he found that his schooling in Ohio, though filled with misery, had prepared him to enter as

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a third-year student. At Dartmouth, for the first time, he seemed to relax. Though he graduated with distinction and a Phi Beta Kappa key, he began to enjoy the camaraderie of college life, forging two lifelong friendships with Charles Cleveland, an intellectual classmate who would become a classics professor, and Hamilton Smith, who would become a well-to-do businessman.

No sooner had he completed his studies than he berated himself for squandering the opportunity: "Especially do I regret that I spent so much of my time in reading novels and other light works," he told a younger student. "They may impart a little brilliancy to the imagination but at length, like an intoxicating draught, they enfeeble and deaden the powers of thought and action." With dramatic flair, the teenage Chase then added: "My life seems to me to have been wasted." While Seward joyfully devoured the works of Dickens and Scott, Chase found no room for fiction in his Spartan intellectual life. After finishing the new novel by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, the author of *The Last Days of Pompeii*, he conceded that "the author is doubtless a gifted being—but he has prostituted God's noblest gifts to the vilest purposes."

The years after his graduation found nineteen-year-old Chase in Washington, D.C., where he eventually established a successful school for boys that attracted the sons of the cabinet members in the administration of John Quincy Adams, as well as the son of Senator Henry Clay. Once again, instead of taking pleasure in his position, he felt his talents went unappreciated. There were distinct classes of society in Washington, Chase told Hamilton Smith. The first, to which he aspired, included the high government officials; the second, to which he was relegated, included teachers and physicians; and the third mechanics and artisans. There was, of course, a still lower class comprised of slaves and laborers. The problem with teaching, he observed, was that any "drunken, miserable dog who could thre'd the mazes of the Alphabet" could set himself up as a teacher, bringing the "profession of teachers into utter contempt." Chase was tormented by the lowly figure he cut in the glittering whirl of Washington life. "I have always thought," he confessed, "that Providence intended me as the instrument of effecting something more than falls to the lot of all men to achieve."

Though this thirst to excel and to distinguish himself had been instilled in Chase early on by his parents, and painfully reinforced by the years with Philander Chase, such sleepless ambition was inflamed by the dynamic American society in the 1820s. Visitors from Europe, the historian Joyce Appleby writes, "saw the novelty of a society directed almost entirely by the ambitious dreams that had been unleashed after the Revolution in the

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heated imagination of thousands of people, most of them poor and young."

Casting about for a career befitting the high estimation in which he held his own talents, Chase wrote to an older brother in 1825 for advice about the different professions. He was contemplating the study of law, perhaps inspired by his acquaintance with Attorney General William Wirt, the father of two of his pupils. Wirt was among the most distinguished figures in Washington, a respected lawyer as well as a literary scholar. He had served as U.S. Attorney General under President James Monroe and had been kept in office by John Quincy Adams. His popular biography of the patriot and lawyer Patrick Henry had made a small name for him in American letters.

A warmhearted, generous man, Wirt welcomed his sons' teenage instructor into his family circle, inviting the lonely Chase to the small dinner parties, private dances, and luxurious levees attended by Washington's elite. At the Wirt household, filled with music and lively conversation, Chase found a respite from the constant pressure he felt to read and study in order to stay ahead of his students. More than three decades later, in the midst of the Civil War, Chase could still summon up vivid details of the "many happy hours" he spent with the Wirt family. "Among women Mrs. [Elizabeth] Wirt had few equals," he recalled. Particularly stamped in his memory was an evening in the garden when Elizabeth Wirt stood beside him, "under the clusters of the multiflora which clambered all over the garden portico of the house and pointed out . . . the stars."

Though supportive and eager to mentor the ambitious and talented young man, the Wirts delicately acknowledged—or so Chase felt—the social gulf that divided Chase from their family. Any attempt on the young teacher's part to move beyond friendship with any one of their four beautiful daughters was, he thought, discouraged. Since he was surrounded by the tantalizing fruits of professional success and social eminence in the Wirt family's parlor, it is no wonder that a career in law beckoned. His brother Alexander warned him that of all the professions, law entailed the most strenuous course of preparation: success required mastery of "thousands of volumes" from "centuries long past," including works of science, the arts, and both ancient and contemporary history. "In fine, you must become a universal scholar." Despite the fact that this description was not an accurate portrait of the course most law students of the day embarked upon, typically, Chase took it to heart, imposing a severe discipline upon himself to rise before daybreak to begin his monumental task of study. Insecurity and ambition combined, as ever, to fuel his efforts. "Day and night must be witness to the assiduity of my labours," he vowed in his diary;

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"knowledge may yet be gained and golden reputation. . . . Future scenes of triumph may yet be mine."

Wirt allowed Salmon to read law in his office and offered encouragement. "*You* will be a distinguished writer," he assured Chase. "I am *sure* of it—You have all the sensibility, talent and enthusiasm essential to success in that walk." The young man wrote breathlessly to Wirt in return, "God [prospering] my exertions, I will imitate your example." As part of his self-designed course of preparation, Chase diligently took notes in the galleries of the House and Senate, practiced his elocution by becoming a member of Washington's Blackstone debating club, and read tirelessly while continuing his duties as a full-time teacher. After hearing the great Daniel Webster speak before the Supreme Court, "his voice deep and sonorous; and his sentiments high and often sublime," he promised himself that if "any degree of industry would enable me to reach his height, how day and night should testify of my toils."

Neither his opportunities nor his impressive discipline yielded Chase much in the way of satisfaction. Rather than savoring his progress, he excoriated himself for not achieving enough. "I feel humbled and mortified," he wrote in his diary, as the year 1829 drew to a close, "by the conviction that the Creator has gifted me with intelligence almost in vain. I am almost twenty two and have as yet attained but the threshold of knowledge. . . . The night has seldom found me much advanced beyond the station I occupied in the morning. . . . I almost despair of ever making any figure in the world." Fear of failure, perhaps intensified by the conviction that his father's failure had precipitated his death and the devastation of his family, would operate throughout Chase's life as a catalyst to his powerful ambition. Even as he scourged himself, he continued to believe that there was still hope, that if he could "once more resolve to struggle earnestly for the prize of well-doing," he would succeed.

As Seward had done, Chase compressed into two years the three-year course of study typically followed by college-educated law students. When the twenty-two-year-old presented himself for examination at the bar in Washington, D.C., in 1829, the presiding judge expressed a wish that Chase "study another year" before attempting to pass. "Please," Chase begged, "I have made all my arrangements to go to the Western country & practice law." The judge, who knew Chase by reputation and was aware of his connection with the distinguished William Wirt, relented and ordered that Chase be sworn in at the bar. Chase had decided to abandon Washington's crowded professional terrain for the open vista and fresh opportunities afforded by the growing state of Ohio.

"I would rather be *first* in Cincinnati than first in Baltimore, twenty

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years hence," Chase immodestly confessed to Charles Cleveland. "As I have ever been first at school and college . . . I shall strive to be first wherever I may be." Cincinnati had become a booming city in 1830, one of the West's largest. Less than two decades earlier, when the state was founded, much of Ohio "was covered by the primeval forest." Chase knew the prospects for a young lawyer would be good in the rapidly developing region, but could not help feeling, as he had upon his arrival in Washington, like "a stranger and an adventurer."

Despite past achievements, Chase suffered from crippling episodes of shyness, exacerbated by his shame over a minor speech defect that lent an unusual tone to his voice. "I wish I was as sure of your *elocution* as I am of everything else," William Wirt cautioned. "Your voice is a little nasal as well as guttural, and your articulation stiff, laborious and thick. . . . I would not mention these things if they were incurable—but they are not, as Demosthenes has proved—and it is only necessary for you to know the fact, to provide the remedy." In addition to the humiliation he felt over his speaking voice, Salmon Chase was tormented by his own name. He fervently wished to change its "awkward, *fishy*" sound to something more elegant. "How wd. this name do (Spencer de Cheyce or Spencer Payne Cheyce)," he inquired of Cleveland. "Perhaps you will laugh at this but I assure you I have suffered no little inconvenience."

Bent on a meteoric rise in this new city, Chase redoubled his resolve to work. "I made this resolution today," he wrote in his diary soon after settling in. "I will try to excel in all things." Pondering the goals he had set for his new life in the West, Chase wrote: "I was fully aware that I must pass thro' a long period of probation. . . . That many obstacles were to be overcome, many difficulties to be surmounted ere I could hope to reach the steep where Fame's proud temple shines," complete with "deserved honor, eminent usefulness and a 'crown of glory.' "

Nonetheless, he had made a good beginning. After struggling for several years to secure enough legal business to support himself, he developed a lucrative practice, representing various business interests and serving as counsel for several large Cincinnati banks. At the same time, following Benjamin Franklin's advice for continual self-improvement, he founded a popular lecture series in Cincinnati, joined a temperance society, undertook the massive project of collecting Ohio's scattered statutes into three published volumes, tried his hand at poetry, and wrote numerous articles for publication in various magazines. To maintain these multiple pursuits, he would often arise at 4 a.m. and occasionally allowed himself to work on Sundays, though he berated himself whenever he did so.

The more successful Chase became, the more his pious family fretted

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over his relentless desire for earthly success and distinction. "I confess I almost tremble for you," his elder sister Abigail wrote him when he was twenty-four years old, "as I observe your desire to distinguish yourself and apparent devotedness to those pursuits whose interests terminate in this life." If his sister hoped that a warm family life would replace his ambition with love, her hopes were brutally crushed by the fates that brought him to love and lose three young wives.

His first, Catherine "Kitty" Garniss—a warm, outgoing, attractive young woman whom he loved passionately—died in 1835 from complications of childbirth after eighteen months of marriage. She was only twenty-three. Her death was "so overwhelming, so unexpected," he told his friend Cleveland, that he could barely function. "I wish you could have known her," he wrote. "She was universally beloved by her acquaintances. . . . She was gifted with unusual intellectual power. . . . And now I feel a loneliness the more dreadful, from the intimacy of the connexion which has been severed."

His grief was compounded by guilt, for he was away on business in Philadelphia when Kitty died, having been assured by her doctor that she would recover. "Oh how I accused myself of folly and wickedness in leaving her when yet sick," he confided in his diary, "how I mourned that the prospect of a little addition to my reputation . . . should have tempted me away."

Chase arrived home to find his front door wreathed in black crepe, a customary sign "that death was within." There "in our nuptial chamber, in her coffin, lay my sweet wife," Chase wrote, "little changed in features—but oh! the look of life was gone. . . . Nothing was left but clay." For months afterward, he berated himself, believing that "the dreadful calamity might have been averted, had I been at home to watch over her & care for her." Learning that the doctors had bled her so profusely that she lost consciousness shortly before she died, he delved into textbooks on medicine and midwifery that persuaded him that, had she been treated differently, she need not have died.

Worst of all, Chase feared that Kitty had died without affirming her faith. He had not pushed her firmly enough toward God. "Oh if I had not contented myself with a few conversations on the subject of religion," he lamented in his diary, "if I had incessantly followed her with kind & earnest persuasion . . . she might have been before her death enrolled among the professed followers of the Lamb. But I procrastinated and now she is gone."

His young wife's death shadowed all the days of his life. He was haunted by the vision that when he himself reached "the bar of God," he would

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meet her "as an accusing spirit," blaming him for her damnation. His guilt rekindled his religious commitment, producing a "second conversion," a renewed determination never to let his fierce ambition supersede his religious duties.

The child upon whom all his affections then centered, named Catherine in honor of her dead mother, lived only five years. Her death in 1840 during an epidemic of scarlet fever devastated Chase. Losing one's only child, he told Charles Cleveland, was "one of the heaviest calamities which human experience can know." Little Catherine, he said, had "lent wings to many delightful moments . . . I fondly looked forward to the time when her increasing attainments and strength would fit her at once for the superintendence of my household & to be my own counsellor and friend." Asking for his friend's prayers, he concluded with the thought that "no language can describe the desolation of my heart."

Eventually, Chase fell in love and married again. The young woman, Eliza Ann Smith, had been a good friend of his first wife. Eliza was only twenty when she gave birth to a daughter, Kate, named in memory of both his first wife and his first daughter. For a few short years, Chase found happiness in a warm marriage sustained by a deep religious bond. It would not last, for after the birth and death of a second daughter, Eliza was diagnosed with tuberculosis, which took her life at the age of twenty-five. "I feel as if my heart was broken," Chase admitted to Cleveland after he placed Eliza's body in the tomb. "I write weeping. I cannot restrain my tears. . . . I have no wife, my little Kate has no mother, and we are desolate."

The following year, Chase married Sarah Belle Ludlow, whose well-to-do father was a leader in Cincinnati society. Belle gave birth to two daughters, Nettie and Zoe. Zoe died at twelve months; two years later, her mother followed her into the grave. Though Chase was only forty-four years old, he would never marry again. "What a vale of misery this world is," he lamented some years later when his favorite sister, Hannah, suffered a fatal heart attack at the dining room table. "To me it has been emphatically so. Death has pursued me incessantly ever since I was twenty-five. . . . Sometimes I feel as if I could give up—as if I *must* give up. And then after all I rise & press on."

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Like Salmon Chase, Edward Bates left the East Coast as a young man, intending, he said, "to go West and grow up with the country." The youngest of twelve children, he was born on a plantation called Belmont, not far from Richmond, Virginia. His father, Thomas Fleming Bates, was a member of the landed gentry with an honored position in his commu-

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nity. Educated in England, the elder Bates was a planter and merchant who owned dozens of slaves and counted Thomas Jefferson and James Madison among his friends. His mother, Caroline Woodson Bates, was of old Virginia stock.

These aristocratic Southerners, recalled Bates's old friend Charles Gibson, were "as distinctly a class as any of the nobility of Western Europe." Modeled on an ideal of English manorial life, they placed greater value on family, hospitality, land, and honor than on commercial success or monetary wealth. Writing nostalgically of this antebellum period, Bates's grandson Onward Bates claimed that life after the Civil War never approached the "enjoyable living" of those leisurely days, when "the visitor to one of these homesteads was sure of a genial welcome from white and black," when "the negroes adopted the names and held all things in common with their masters, including their virtues and their manners."

Life for the Bates family was comfortable and secure until the Revolutionary War, when Thomas Bates, a practicing Quaker, set aside his pacifist principles to take up arms against the British. He and his family were proud of his service in the Continental Army. The flintlock musket he carried was handed down to the next generations with the silver-plated inscription: "Thomas F. Bates, whig of the revolution, fought for liberty and independence with this gun. His descendants keep it to defend what he helped to win." His decision to join the military, however, cost him dearly. Upon returning home, he was ostracized from the Quaker meetinghouse and never recovered from the debts incurred by the family estate while he was away fighting. Though he still owned extensive property, he struggled thenceforth to meet the needs of his seven sons and five daughters.

Like Seward and Chase, young Edward revealed an early aptitude for study. Though schools in Goochland County were few, Edward was taught to read and write by his father and, by the age of eight, showed a talent for poetry. Edward was only eleven when his father's death brought an abrupt end to family life at Belmont. Left in straitened circumstances, his mother, like Chase's, sent the children to live with various relatives. Edward spent two years with his older brother Fleming Bates, in Northumberland, Virginia, before settling into the home of a scholarly cousin, Benjamin Bates, in Hanover, Maryland. There, under his cousin's tutelage, he acquired a solid foundation in the fields of mathematics, history, botany, and astronomy. Still, he missed the bustle and companionship of his numerous siblings, and pined for his family's Belmont estate. At fourteen, he entered Charlotte Hall, a private academy in Maryland where he studied literature and the classics in preparation for enrollment at Princeton.

He never did attend Princeton. It is said that he sustained an injury that

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forced him to end his studies at Charlotte Hall. Returning to Belmont, he enlisted in the Virginia militia during the War of 1812, armed with his father's old flintlock musket. In 1814, at the age of twenty-one, he joined the flood of settlers into Missouri Territory, lured by the vast potential west of the Appalachian Mountains, lately opened by the Louisiana Purchase. Over the next three decades, the population of this western region would explode at three times the rate of the original thirteen states. From his home in Virginia, Bates set out alone on the arduous journey that would take him across Kentucky, Illinois, and Indiana to the Missouri Territory, "too young to think much of the perils which he might encounter," he later mused, "the West being then the scene of many Indian outrages."

Young Bates could not have chosen a better moment to move westward. President Jefferson had appointed Bates's older brother Frederick secretary of the new Missouri Territory. When Edward arrived in the frontier outpost of St. Louis, Missouri was seven years away from statehood. Bates saw no buildings or homes along the riverbank, only battered canoes and flatboats chafing at their moorings. Some 2,500 villagers dwelt predominantly in primitive cabins or single-story wooden houses. When he walked down Third Street to the Market, he recalled, "all was in commotion: a stranger had come from the States! He was 'feted' and followed by young and old, the girls looking at him as one of his own town lasses, in Virginia, would have regarded an elk or a buffalo!"

With help from his brother, Bates secured a position reading law with Rufus Easton, a distinguished frontier lawyer who had served as a territorial judge and delegate to Congress. "After years of family and personal insecurity," Bates's biographer Marvin Cain writes, "he at last had a stable situation through which he could achieve the ambition that burned brightly in him." Mentored by his older brother Frederick, the lawyer Easton, and a close circle of St. Louis colleagues, Bates, too, passed his bar examination after two years of study and instantly plunged into practice. Lawyers were in high demand on the rapidly settling frontier.

The economic and professional prospects were so promising in St. Louis that the Bates brothers determined to bring the rest of their family there. Edward returned to Virginia to sell his father's estate, auction off any family slaves he would not transport to Missouri, and arrange to escort his mother and his older sister Margaret on the long overland journey. "The slaves sold pretty well," he boasted to Frederick, "a young woman at $537 and a boy child 5 years old at $290!" As for the land, he expected to realize about $20,000, which would allow the family to relocate west "quite full-handed."

Edward's attempts to settle family affairs in Virginia dragged on, com-

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plicated by the death of his brother Tarleton, a fervent Jeffersonian, killed in a duel with a Federalist. "I am ashamed to say I am still in Goochland," he wrote Frederick in June 1818, nearly a year after he had left St. Louis; it is "my misfortune rather than my fault for I am the greatest sufferer by the delay." Finally, with his female relatives ensconced in a carriage and more than twenty slaves following on horseback and on foot, the little party set forth on an exasperating, difficult expedition. "In those days," one of Bates's friends later recalled, "there were no boats on the Western rivers, and no roads in the country." To cross the wilds of Illinois and Indiana, a guide was necessary. The slow pace caused Bates to worry that Frederick would think him "a lazy or squandering fellow." He explained that if accompanied only by his family, he could have reached St. Louis "in a tenth part of the time & with 1/4 of the trouble and expense—the slaves have been the greatest objects of my embarrassment." The journey did have benefits, he reported: "Mother & Sister are more active, more healthy & more cheerful than when they started. They bear the fatigues of hot dry traveling surprisingly." And once they reached St. Louis, Bates assured his brother, he would "make up in comfort & satisfaction for the great suspense and anxiety I must have occasioned you."

As he again settled into the practice of law in St. Louis, the twenty-five-year-old Bates fully appreciated the advantages gained by his older brother's prominence in the community. In a fulsome letter, he expressed fervent gratitude to his "friend and benefactor," realizing that Fred's "public reputation" as well as his "private wealth & influence" would greatly enhance his own standing. His brother also introduced him to the leading figures of St. Louis—including the famed explorer William Clark, now governor of the Missouri Territory; Thomas Hart Benton, editor of the *Missouri Enquirer;* and David Barton, speaker of the territorial legislature and the guiding hand behind Missouri's drive for statehood. Before long, he found himself in a partnership with Joshua Barton, the younger brother of David Barton. Together, the two well-connected young men began to build a lucrative practice representing the interests of influential businessmen and landholders.

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN faced obstacles unimaginable to the other candidates for the Republican nomination. In sharp contrast to the comfortable lifestyle the Seward family enjoyed, and the secure early childhoods of Chase and Bates before their fathers died, Lincoln's road to success was longer, more tortuous, and far less likely.

Born on February 12, 1809, in a log cabin on an isolated farm in the

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slave state of Kentucky, Abraham had an older sister, Sarah, who died in childbirth when he was nineteen, and a younger brother who died in infancy. His father, Thomas, had never learned to read and, according to Lincoln, never did "more in the way of writing than to bunglingly sign his own name." As a six-year-old boy, young Thomas had watched when a Shawnee raiding party murdered his father. This violent death, Lincoln later suggested, coupled with the "very narrow circumstances" of his mother, left Thomas "a wandering laboring boy," growing up "litterally without education." He was working as a rough carpenter and hired hand when he married Nancy Hanks, a quiet, intelligent young woman of uncertain ancestry.

In the years following Abraham's birth, the Lincolns moved from one dirt farm to another in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois. On each of these farms, Thomas cleared only enough land for his family's use. Lack of ambition joined with insufficient access to a market for surplus goods to trap Thomas in relentless poverty.

In later life, Lincoln neither romanticized nor sentimentalized the difficult circumstances of his childhood. When asked in 1860 by his campaign biographer, John Locke Scripps, to share the details of his early days, he hesitated. "Why Scripps, it is a great piece of folly to attempt to make anything out of my early life. It can all be condensed into a single sentence . . . you will find in Gray's Elegy: 'The short and simple annals of the poor.' "

The traces of Nancy Hanks in history are few and fragmentary. A childhood friend and neighbor of Lincoln's, Nathaniel Grigsby, reported that Mrs. Lincoln "was a woman Know(n) for the Extraordinary Strength of her mind among the family and all who knew her: she was superior to her husband in Every way. She was a brilliant woman." Nancy's first cousin Dennis Hanks, a childhood friend of Abraham's, recalled that Mrs. Lincoln "read the good Bible to [Abe]—taught him to read and to spell—taught him sweetness & benevolence as well." She was described as "beyond all doubt an intellectual woman"; said to possess "Remarkable" perception; to be "very smart" and "naturally Strong minded."

Much later, Lincoln, alluding to the possibility that his mother had come from distinguished stock, told his friend William Herndon: "All that I am or hope ever to be I get from my mother, God bless her."

In the early autumn of 1818, when Abraham was nine, Nancy Lincoln contracted what was known as "milk sickness"—a fatal ailment whose victims suffered dizziness, nausea, and an irregular heartbeat before slipping into a coma. The disease first struck Thomas and Elizabeth Sparrow, Nancy Lincoln's aunt and uncle, who had joined the Lincolns in Indiana the previous winter. The Sparrows had parented Nancy since she was a

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ers if he could—would do so willingly if he could." Young Lincoln's self-assurance was enhanced by his physical size and strength, qualities that were valued highly on the frontier. "He was a strong, athletic boy," one friend related, "good-natured, and ready to out-run, out-jump and out-wrestle or out-lift anybody in the neighborhood."

In their early years, each of his rivals shared a similar awareness of unusual talents, but Lincoln faced much longer odds to realize his ambitions. His voyage would require a Herculean feat of self-creation. Perhaps the best evidence of his exceptional nature, as well as the genesis of his great gift for storytelling, is manifest in the eagerness with which, even at six or seven, he listened to the stories the adults exchanged as they sat by his father's fireplace at night. Knob Creek farm, where Lincoln lived from the age of two until seven, stood along the old Cumberland Trail that stretched from Louisville to Nashville. Caravans of pioneers passed by each day heading toward the Northwest—farmers, peddlers, preachers, each with a tale to tell.

Night after night, Thomas Lincoln would swap tales with visitors and neighbors while his young son sat transfixed in the corner. In these sociable settings, Thomas was in his element. A born storyteller, he possessed a quick wit, a talent for mimicry, and an uncanny memory for exceptional stories. These qualities would prove his greatest bequest to his son. Young Abe listened so intently to these stories, crafted from experiences of everyday life, that the words became embedded in his memory. Nothing was more upsetting to him, he recalled decades later, nothing made him angrier, than his inability to comprehend everything that was told.

After listening to adults chatter through the evening, he would spend, he said, "no small part of the night walking up and down, and trying to make out what was the exact meaning of some of their, to me, dark sayings." Unable to sleep, he would reformulate the conversations until, as he recalled, "I had put it in language plain enough, as I thought, for any boy I knew to comprehend." The following day, having translated the stories into words and ideas that his friends could grasp, he would climb onto the tree stump or log that served as an impromptu stage and mesmerize his own circle of young listeners. He had discovered the pride and pleasure an attentive audience could bestow. This great storytelling talent and oratorical skill would eventually constitute his stock-in-trade throughout both his legal and political careers. The passion for rendering experience into powerful language remained with Lincoln throughout his life.

The only schools in rural Kentucky and Indiana were subscription schools, requiring families to pay a tuition. Even when frontier families could afford the expense, their children did not always receive much edu-

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cation. "No qualification was ever required of a teacher," Lincoln recalled, "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 wizzard." Allowed to attend school only "by littles" between stints of farmwork, "the aggregate of all his schooling," Lincoln admitted years later, "did not amount to one year." He had never even set foot "inside of a college or academy building" until he acquired his license to practice law. What he had in the way of education, he lamented, he had to pick up on his own.

Books became his academy, his college. The printed word united his mind with the great minds of generations past. Relatives and neighbors recalled that he scoured the countryside for books and read every volume "he could lay his hands on." At a time when ownership of books remained "a luxury for those Americans living outside the purview of the middle class," gaining access to reading material proved difficult. When Lincoln obtained copies of the King James Bible, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Aesop's Fables*, and William Scott's *Lessons in Elocution*, he could not contain his excitement. Holding *Pilgrim's Progress* in his hands, "his eyes sparkled, and that day he could not eat, and that night he could not sleep."

When printing was first invented, Lincoln would later write, "the great mass of men . . . were utterly unconscious, that their *conditions*, or their *minds* were capable of improvement." To liberate "the mind from this false and under estimate of itself, is the great task which printing came into the world to perform." He was, of course, also speaking of himself, of the transforming liberation of a young boy unlocking the miraculous mysteries of language, discovering a world of possibilities in the small log cabin on the frontier that he later called "as unpoetical as any spot of the earth."

"There is no Frigate like a Book," wrote Emily Dickinson, "to take us Lands away." Though the young Lincoln never left the frontier, would never leave America, he traveled with Byron's *Childe Harold* to Spain and Portugal, the Middle East and Italy; accompanied Robert Burns to Edinburgh; and followed the English kings into battle with Shakespeare. As he explored the wonders of literature and the history of the country, the young Lincoln, already conscious of his own power, developed ambitions far beyond the expectations of his family and neighbors. It was through literature that he was able to transcend his surroundings.

He read and reread the Bible and *Aesop's Fables* so many times that years later he could recite whole passages and entire stories from memory. Through Scott's *Lessons in Elocution*, he first encountered selections from Shakespeare's plays, inspiring a love for the great dramatist's writings long before he ever saw a play. He borrowed a volume of the *Revised Statutes of*

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Indiana from the local constable, a work that contained the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787—documents that would become foundation stones of his philosophical and political thought.

Everywhere he went, Lincoln carried a book with him. He thumbed through page after page while his horse rested at the end of a long row of planting. Whenever he could escape work, he would lie with his head against a tree and read. Though he acquired only a handful of volumes, they were seminal works of the English language. Reading the Bible and Shakespeare over and over implanted rhythms and poetry that would come to fruition in those works of his maturity that made Abraham Lincoln our only poet-president. With remarkable energy and tenacity he quarried the thoughts and ideas that he wanted to remember. "When he came across a passage that Struck him," his stepmother recalled, "he would write it down on boards if he had no paper," and "when the board would get too black he would shave it off with a drawing knife and go on again." Then once he obtained paper, he would rewrite it and keep it in a scrapbook so that it could be memorized. Words thus became precious to him, never, as with Seward, to be lightly or indiscriminately used.

The volumes to feed Lincoln's intellectual hunger did not come cheaply. The story is often recounted of the time he borrowed Parson Weems's *Life of George Washington* from Josiah Crawford, a well-to-do farmer who lived sixteen miles away. Thrilled by this celebrated account of the first president's life, he took the book to his loft at night, where, by the light of a tallow candle, or if tallow was scarce, by a grease lamp made from hickory bark gathered in the woods, he read as long as he could stay awake, placing the book on a makeshift shelf between the cabin logs so he could retrieve it at daybreak. During a severe rainstorm one night, the book was badly soiled and the covers warped. Lincoln went to Crawford's house, explained what had happened, and offered to work off the value of the book. Crawford calculated the value of two full days' work pulling corn, which Lincoln considered an unfair reimbursement. Nevertheless, he straightway set to work and kept on until "there was not a corn blade left on a stalk." Then, having paid his debt, Lincoln wrote poems and songs lampooning "Josiah blowing his bugle"—Crawford's large nose. Thus Crawford, in return for loaning Lincoln a book and then exorbitantly penalizing him, won a permanent, if unflattering, place in American history.

A lucid, inquisitive, and extraordinarily dogged mind was Lincoln's native endowment. Already he possessed a vivid sensibility for the beauty of the English language. Often reading aloud, he was attracted to the sound

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of language along with its meaning—its music and rhythms. He found this in poetry, and to the end of his life would recite poems, often lengthy passages, from memory. He seemed especially drawn to poetry that spoke of our doomed mortality and the transience of earthly achievements. For clearly Lincoln, this acolyte of pure reason and remorseless logic, was also a romantic. All three of Lincoln's rivals shared his early love of books, but none had as difficult a task securing them or finding the leisure to read. In the household of his classically educated father, Seward had only to pick a book from well-stocked shelves, while both local academies he attended and Union College maintained substantial collections of books on history, logic, rhetoric, philosophy, chemistry, grammar, and geography. Chase, likewise, had access to libraries, at his uncle's boys' school in Worthington and at Dartmouth College. And while books were not plentiful where Bates grew up, he had the luxury of his scholarly relative's home, where he could peruse at will an extensive collection.

The distance between the educational advantages Lincoln's rivals enjoyed and the hardships he endured was rendered even greater by the cultural resistance Lincoln faced once his penchant for reading became known. In the pioneer world of rural Kentucky and Indiana, where physical labor was essential for survival and mental exertion was rarely considered a legitimate form of work, Lincoln's book hunger was regarded as odd and indolent. Nor would his community understand the thoughts and emotions stirred by his reading; there were few to talk to about the most important and deeply experienced activities of his mind.

While Lincoln's stepmother took "particular Care not to disturb him—would let him read on and on till [he] quit of his own accord," his father needed help with the tiresome chores of felling trees, digging up stumps, splitting rails, plowing, weeding, and planting. When he found his son in the field reading a book or, worse still, distracting fellow workers with tales or passages from one of his books, he would angrily halt the activity so work could continue. The boy's endeavors to better himself often incurred the resentment of his father, who occasionally destroyed his books and may have physically abused him.

Lincoln's relationship with his father grew strained, particularly when his last chance for schooling was foreclosed by his father's decision to hire him out. He labored for various neighbors butchering hogs, digging wells, and clearing land in order to satisfy a debt the family had incurred. Such conflict between father and son was played out in thousands of homes as the "self-made" men in Lincoln's generation sought to pursue ambitions beyond the cramped lives of their fathers.

The same "longing to rise" that carried Seward away from the Hudson

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Valley brought Chase to the infant state of Ohio, and sent Bates to the Missouri Territory propelled Lincoln from Indiana to New Salem, Illinois. At twenty-two, he departed his family home with all his meager possessions bundled on his shoulder. New Salem was a budding town, with twenty-five families, three general stores, a tavern, a blacksmith shop, a cooper shop, and a tannery. Working simply to "keep body and soul together" as a flatboatman, clerk, merchant, postmaster, and surveyor, he engaged in a systematic regimen of self-improvement. He mastered the principles of English grammar at night when the store was closed. He carried Shakespeare's plays and books of poetry when he walked along the streets. Seated in the local post office, he devoured newspapers. He studied geometry and trigonometry while learning the art of surveying. And then, at the age of twenty-five, he decided to study law.

In a time when young men were apprenticed to practicing lawyers while they read the law, Lincoln, by his own account, "studied with nobody." Borrowing law books from a friend, he set about on his own to gain the requisite knowledge and skills. He buried himself in the dog-eared pages of Blackstone's *Commentaries;* he unearthed the thoughts in Chitty's *Pleadings;* he analyzed precepts in Greenleaf's *Evidence* and Story's *Equity Jurisprudence*. After a long day at one of his various jobs, he would read far into the night. A steadfast purpose sustained him.

Few of his colleagues experienced so solitary or steep a climb to professional proficiency. The years Seward and Chase spent in college eased the transition into legal study by exposing them to history, classical languages, and scientific reasoning. What is more, Lincoln had no outlet for discourse, no mentor such as Seward found in the distinguished author of *The Practice*. Nor did Lincoln have the social advantages Chase enjoyed by reading law with the celebrated William Wirt or the connections Bates derived from Rufus Easton.

What Lincoln lacked in preparation and guidance, he made up for with his daunting concentration, phenomenal memory, acute reasoning faculties, and interpretive penetration. Though untutored in the sciences and the classics, he was able to read and reread his books until he understood them fully. "Get the books, and read and study them," he told a law student seeking advice in 1855. It did not matter, he continued, whether the reading be done in a small town or a large city, by oneself or in the company of others. "The *books*, and your *capacity* for understanding them, are just the same in all places. . . . Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed, is more important than any other one thing."

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Seward shared Lincoln's doubt that any posthumous reunion beckoned. When his wife and precious twenty-one-year-old daughter, Fanny, died within sixteen months of each other, he was devastated. "I ought to be able to rejoice that [Fanny] was withdrawn from me to be reunited with [her mother] the pure and blessed spirit that formed her own," he told a friend. "But, unfortunately I am not spiritual enough to find support in these reflections."

If Lincoln, like Seward, confronted the loss of loved ones without prospect of finding them in the afterlife to assuage the loss, one begins to comprehend the weight of his sorrow when Ann died. Nonetheless, he completed his study of law and received his law license and the offer to become a partner with John Stuart, the friend whose law books he had borrowed.

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In April 1837, twenty months after Ann Rutledge's death, Lincoln left New Salem for Springfield, Illinois, then a community of about fifteen hundred people. There he planned to embark upon what he termed his "experiment" in law. With no place to stay and no money to buy provisions, he wandered into the general store in the town square. He asked the young proprietor, Joshua Speed, how much it would cost to buy "the furniture for a single bed. The mattress, blankets, sheets, coverlid, and pillow." Speed estimated the cost at seventeen dollars, which Lincoln agreed was "perhaps cheap enough," though he lacked the funds to cover that amount. He asked if Speed might advance him credit until Christmastime, when, if his venture with law worked out, he would pay in full. "If I fail in this," added Lincoln abjectly, "I do not know that I can ever pay you."

Speed surveyed the tall, discomfited figure before him. "I never saw a sadder face," he recalled thinking at the time. Though the two men had never met, Speed had heard Lincoln speak a year earlier and came away deeply impressed. Decades later, he could still recite Lincoln's concluding words. Turning to Lincoln, Speed said: "You seem to be so much pained at contracting so small a debt, I think I can suggest a plan by which you can avoid the debt and at the same time attain your end. I have a large room with a double bed upstairs, which you are very welcome to share with me." Lincoln reacted quickly to Speed's unexpected offer. Racing upstairs to deposit his bags in the loft, he came clattering down again, his face entirely transformed. "Beaming with pleasure he exclaimed, 'Well, Speed, I am moved!' "

Five years younger than Lincoln, the handsome, blue-eyed Speed had been raised in a gracious mansion on his family's prosperous plantation, cultivated by more than seventy slaves. He had received an excellent edu-

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cation in the best Kentucky schools and at St. Joseph's College at Bardstown. While he could have remained at home, enjoying a life of ease, he determined to make his way west with the tide of his restless generation. Arriving in Springfield when he was twenty-one, he had invested in real estate and become the proprietor of the town's general store.

Lincoln and Speed shared the same room for nearly four years, sleeping in the same double bed. Over time, the two young men developed a close relationship, talking nightly of their hopes and their prospects, their mutual love of poetry and politics, their anxieties about women. They attended political meetings and forums together, went to dances and parties, relaxed with long rides in the countryside.

Emerging from a childhood and young adulthood marked by isolation and loneliness, Lincoln discovered in Joshua Speed a companion with whom he could share his inner life. They had similar dispositions, both possessing an ambitious impulse to improve themselves and rise in the world. No longer a boy but not yet an established adult, Lincoln ended years of emotional deprivation and intellectual solitude by building his first and deepest friendship with Speed. Openly acknowledging the strength of this attachment, the two pledged themselves to a lifelong bond of friendship. Those who knew Lincoln well pointed to Speed as his "most intimate friend," the only person to whom he ever disclosed his secret thoughts. "You know my desire to befriend you is everlasting," Lincoln assured Speed, "that I will never cease, while I know how to do any thing."

Some have suggested that there may have been a sexual relationship between Lincoln and Speed. Their intimacy, however, like the relationship between Seward and Berdan and, as we shall see, between Chase and Stanton, is more an index to an era when close male friendships, accompanied by open expressions of affection and passion, were familiar and socially acceptable. Nor can sharing a bed be considered evidence of an erotic involvement. It was common practice in an era when private quarters were a rare luxury, when males regularly slept in the same bed as children and continued to do so in academies, boardinghouses, and overcrowded hotels. The room above Speed's store functioned as a sort of dormitory, with two other young men living there part of the time as well as Lincoln and Speed. The attorneys of the Eighth Circuit in Illinois where Lincoln would travel regularly shared beds—with the exception of Judge David Davis, whose immense girth left no room for a companion. As the historian Donald Yacovone writes in his study of the fiercely expressed love and devotion among several abolitionist leaders in the same era, the "preoccupation with elemental sex" reveals more about later centuries "than about the nineteenth."

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If it is hard to delineate the exact nature of Lincoln's relationship with Speed, it is clear that this intimate friendship came at a critical juncture in his young life, as he struggled to define himself in a new city, away from home and family. Here in Springfield he would carry forward the twin careers that would occupy most of his life: law and politics. His accomplishments in escaping the confines of his barren, death-battered childhood and his relentless self-education required luck, a stunning audacity, and a breadth of intelligence that was only beginning to reveal itself.

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CHAPTER 3

THE LURE OF POLITICS

IN THE ONLY COUNTRY founded on the principle that men should and could govern themselves, where self-government dominated every level of human association from the smallest village to the nation's capital, it was natural that politics should be a consuming, almost universal concern.

"Scarcely have you descended on the soil of America," wrote Alexis de Tocqueville in the year Lincoln was serving his first term in the state legislature, "when you find yourself in the midst of a sort of tumult; a confused clamor is raised on all sides; a thousand voices come to your ear at the same time, each of them expressing some social needs. Around you everything moves: here, the people of one neighborhood have gathered to learn if a church ought to be built; there, they are working on the choice of a representative; farther on, the deputies of a district are going to town in all haste

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in order to decide about some local improvements; in another place, the farmers of a village abandon their furrows to go discuss the plan of a road or a school."

"Citizens assemble with the sole goal of declaring that they disapprove of the course of government," Tocqueville wrote. "To meddle in the government of society and to speak about it is the greatest business and, so to speak, the only pleasure that an American knows. . . . An American does not know how to converse, but he discusses; he does not discourse, but he holds forth. He always speaks to you as to an assembly."

In an illustration from Noah Webster's *Elementary Spelling Book*, widely read in Lincoln's generation, a man strikes a heroic pose as he stands on a wooden barrel, speaking to a crowd of enthralled listeners. Behind him the Stars and Stripes wave proudly, while a poster bearing the image of the national eagle connotes the bravery and patriotism of the orator. "Who can wonder," Ralph Waldo Emerson asked, at the lure of politics, "for our ambitious young men, when the highest bribes of society are at the feet of the successful orator? He has his audience at his devotion. All other fames must hush before his."

For many ambitious young men in the nineteenth century, politics proved the chosen arena for advancement. Politics attracted Bates in Missouri, Seward in upstate New York, Lincoln in Illinois, and Chase in Ohio.

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THE OLDEST OF THE FOUR, Edward Bates was the first drawn into politics during the 1820 crusade for Missouri's statehood. As the petition was debated in the U.S. Congress, an argument arose as to whether the constitutional protection for slavery in the original states applied to the newly acquired territories. An antislavery representative from New York introduced an amendment requiring Missouri first to agree to emancipate all children of slaves on their twenty-first birthday. The so-called "lawyer faction," including Edward Bates, vehemently opposed an antislavery restriction as the price of admission to the Union. Bates argued that it violated the Constitution by imposing a qualification on a state beyond providing "a republican form of government," as guaranteed by the Constitution.

To Northerners who hoped containment in the South would lead inevitably to the end of slavery, its introduction into the new territories aroused fear that it would now infiltrate the West and, thereby, the nation's future. For Southerners invested in slave labor, Northern opposition to Missouri's admission as a slave state posed a serious threat to their way of life. At the height of the struggle, Southern leaders declared their intent to

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choly and melting mood." There was a "magic" in her loveliness, which left him "like a schoolboy lover" in the absence of his "dear Julia." Now, after only a few weeks away, he was moved to cry, "a plague upon the vanity of petty ambition! Were I great enough to sway the destinies of the nation, the meed of ambition might be worth the sacrifice which it requires; but a mere seat in Congress as a subaltern member, is a contemptible price for the happiness which we enjoy with each other. It was always your opinion, & now I feel it to be true."

His spirits revived somewhat when he settled into a comfortable Washington boardinghouse and took his seat in Congress alongside David Crockett, James Polk, and Henry Clay. Though Bates seldom went out to parties, preferring to spend his nights reading and writing to his wife, he was thrilled, he told Julia, to spend a private evening with Henry Clay. "That man grows upon me more and more, every time I see him," he wrote. "There is an intuitive perception about him, that seems to see & understand at a glance, and a winning fascination in his manners that will suffer none to be his enemies who associate with him."

The main issues that confronted Bates during his congressional term concerned the disposition of western lands, internal improvements, and the tariff. On each of these issues, Senators Benton and Barton were antagonists. Benton had introduced a bill under which the federal government would make its lands available to settlers at a price so low that it was almost free. Cheap land, he argued, would bridle the rampant speculation that profited the few over the many. Barton countered with the claim that such cheap land would depress the entire Western economy. Bates sided with Barton, voting against the popular bill.

During the dispute over public lands, Bates published a pamphlet denouncing Benton that so angered "Old Bullion," as he was known, that the two men did not speak for nearly a quarter of a century. "My piece is burning into his reputation," Bates told Julia, "like aquafortis upon iron—the mark can never be effaced." Beyond his open quarrel with Benton, Bates got along well with his colleagues. His natural warmth and easy manner created respect and affection. Night sessions he found particularly amusing and intriguing, despite the "roaring disorder" of people "hawking, coughing, thumping with their canes & kicking about spit boxes." The hall, suffused with candlelight from members' desks, and from the massive chandelier suspended from the domed ceiling, "exhibit[ed] a most magnificent appearance."

Nonetheless, these few moments of pleasure could not compensate for missing the birth of his first daughter, Nancy. "As yet I only know that *she is*," he lamented, "I long to know *how* she is—*what* she is—who she is

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like . . . whether she has black eyes or gray—a long nose or a pug—a wide mouth or a narrow one—and above all, whether she has a pretty foot," for without a pretty foot, like her mother's, he predicted, she could never make "a *fine* woman."

"Oh! How I long to see & press you to my bosom," he told Julia, "if it were but for a moment. Sometimes, I almost realize the vision—I see you with such vivid and impassioned precision, that the very form developing is in my eye." In letter after letter, the physical immediacy of their relationship becomes clear. Responding to Julia's admission of her own downcast spirits, he wrote: "O, that I could kiss the tear from that cheek whose cheerful brightness is my sunshine."

Still, public life enticed him, and at the behest of his friends and supporters, Bates agreed to run for a second term. Despite his great personal popularity, he lost his bid for reelection in the wake of the great Jacksonian landslide that gave Benton and the Democrats complete control of Missouri politics. During the last days of his term, the usually soft-spoken Bates got into a heated argument with Congressman George McDuffie of South Carolina on the floor of the House. McDuffie ridiculed him personally, and Bates impulsively challenged the South Carolinian to a duel. Fortunately, McDuffie declined, agreeing to apologize for his offensive language. Years later, reflecting on the Southern "Code" of dueling, Bates's friend Charles Gibson maintained that as wicked as the code was, the vulgar public behavior following the demise of the practice was worse still. "The code preserved a dignity, justice and decorum that have since been lost," he argued, "to the great detriment of the professions, the public and the government. The present generation will think me barbarous but I believe that some lives lost in protecting the tone of the bar and the press, on which the Republic itself so largely depends, are well spent."

As the thirty-six-year-old Bates packed up his documents and books to return home, he assured Julia that he was genuinely relieved to have lost. While he loved his friends "as much as any man," he wrote, "for happiness I look alone to the bosom of my own family." Not a day passed, he happily reported, that he did not "divide and subdivide" his time by making plans for their future. He meant first of all "to take & maintain a station in the front rank" of his profession, so that he could provide for his family all the "various little comforts & amusements we have often talked over & wished we possessed."

Months and years slipped by, and Bates remained true to his word. Though he served two terms in the state legislature, where he was regarded as "the ablest and most eloquent member of that body," he decided in 1835 to devote his full attention to his flourishing law practice, rather

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than run for reelection. Throughout the prime of his life, therefore, Bates found his chief gratification in home and family.

His charming diary, faithfully recorded for more than three decades, provides a vivid testament to his domestic preoccupations. While ruminations upon ambition, success, and power are ubiquitous in Chase's introspective diary, Bates focused on the details of everyday life, the comings and goings of his children, the progress of his garden, and the social events in his beloved St. Louis. His interest in history, he once observed, lay less in the usual records of wars and dynasties than in the more neglected areas of domestic laws, morals, and social manners.

The smallest details of his children's lives fascinated him. When Ben, his fourteenth child, was born, he noted the "curious fact" that the child had a birthmark on the right side of his belly resembling a frog. Attempting to explain "one of the Mysteries in which God has shrouded nature," he recalled that a few weeks before the child was born, while his wife lay on the bed reading, she was unpleasantly startled by the sudden appearance of a tree frog. At the time, "she was lying on her left side, with her right hand resting on her body above the hip," Bates noted, "and in the corresponding part of the child's body is the distinct mark of the frog."

Faith in the powers of God irradiates the pages of his diary. His son Julian, a "bad stammerer from his childhood"—the family had begun to fear that "he was incurable"—miraculously began one day to speak without the slightest hesitation. "A new faculty," Bates recorded, "is given to one who seemed to have been cut off from one of the chief blessings of humanity." In return for this restoration to speech, Bates hoped that his son would eventually "qualify himself to preach the Gospel," for he had "never seen in any youth a more devoted piety." Sadly, the "miracle" did not last long; within six months Julian was stuttering again.

On rare occasions when his wife left to visit relatives, Bates mourned her absence from the home where she was both "Mistress & Queen." He reminded himself that he must not "begrudge her the short respite" from the innumerable tasks of caring for a large family. Giving birth to seventeen children in thirty-two years, Julia was pregnant throughout nearly all her childbearing years. Savoring the warmth of his family circle, Bates felt the loss of each child who grew up and moved away. "This day," he noted in 1851, "my son Barton, with his family—wife and one child—moved into his new house. . . . He has lived with us ever since his marriage in March 1849. This is a serious diminution of our household, being worried that, as our children are fast growing up, & will soon scatter about, in search of their own futures, we may soon expect to have but a little family in a large house."

The diaries Bates kept also reveal a deep commitment to his home city

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of St. Louis. Every year, on April 29, he marked the anniversary of his first arrival in the town. As the years passed, he witnessed "mighty changes in population, locomotion, commerce and the arts," which made St. Louis the jewel of the great Mississippi Valley and would, he predicted, eventually make it "the ruling city of the continent." His entries proudly record the first gas illumination of the streets, the transmission of the first telegraph between St. Louis and the eastern cities, and the first day that a railroad train moved west of the Mississippi.

Bates witnessed a great fire in 1849 that reduced the commercial section of the city to rubble and endured a cholera epidemic that same year that killed more than a hundred each day, hearses rolling through the muddy streets from morning till night. In one week alone, he recorded, the total deaths numbered nearly a thousand. His own family pulled through "in perfect health," in part, he believed, because they rejected the general opinion of avoiding fruits and vegetables. He agonized over the medical ignorance about the origin of the disease or its remedy. "No two of them agree with each other, and no one agrees with himself two weeks at a time." As the epidemic worsened, scores of families left the city in fear of contagion, but Bates refused to do so. To a friend who had offered sanctuary on his plantation outside of the city, he explained: "I am one of the oldest of the American inhabitants, have a good share of public respect & confidence, and consequently, some influence with the people. I hold it to be a sacred duty, that admits of no compromise, to stand my ground and be ready to do & to bear my part. . . . I should be ashamed to leave St. Louis under existing circumstances. . . . It would be an abandonment of a known duty."

Beyond commentary on his family and his city, Bates filled the pages of his diary with observations of the changing seasons, the progress of his flowers, and the phases of the moon. He celebrated the first crocus each year, his elm trees shedding seed, oaks in full tassel, tulips in their prime. So vivid are his descriptions of his garden that the reader can almost hear the rustling leaves of fall, or "the frogs . . . croaking, in full chorus" that filled the spring nights. With an acute eye he observed that plants change color with age. Meticulously noting variation and difference, he never felt that he was repeating the same patterns of activity year after year. He was a contented man.

However, he never fully abandoned his interest in politics. His passion for the development of the West led him to a major role in the River and Harbor Convention called in the late 1840s to protest President Polk's veto of the Whig-sponsored internal improvements bill. The assembly is said to have been "the largest Convention ever gathered in the United States prior to the Civil War." More than 5,000 accredited delegates and

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countless other spectators joined Chicago's 16,000 inhabitants, filling every conceivable room in every hotel, boardinghouse, and private dwelling. Desperate visitors to the overcrowded city even sought places to sleep aboard boats in Chicago's harbor.

Former and future governors, congressmen, and senators were there, including Tom Corwin from Ohio, Thurlow Weed and *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley from New York, and Schuyler Colfax of Indiana, who was chosen to serve as secretary of the convention. New York was also represented by Democrat David Dudley Field, designated to present Polk's arguments against federal appropriations for internal improvements in the states. Also in attendance, Greeley wrote, was "Hon. Abraham Lincoln, a tall specimen of an Illinoian, just elected to Congress from the only Whig District in the State." It was Lincoln's first mention in a paper of national repute.

"No one who saw [Lincoln] can forget his personal appearance at that time," one delegate recalled years later. "Tall, angular and awkward, he had on a short-waisted, thin swallow-tail coat, a short vest of same material, thin pantaloons, scarcely coming down to his ankles, a straw hat and a pair of brogans with woolen socks."

On the first day, Edward Bates was chosen president of the convention, much to his "deep astonishment," given the presence of so many eminent delegates. "If notice had been given me of any intention to nominate me for the presidency of the Convention, I should have shrunk from it with dread & repressed the attempt," Bates confided to his diary. He was apprehensive that party politics would render the convention unsuccessful and that he would then bear the brunt of responsibility for its failure. Yet so skillfully and impartially did he conduct the proceedings and so eloquently did he make the case for internal improvements and development of the inland waterways that he "leaped at one bound into national prominence." On a much smaller scale, Lincoln impressed the audience with his clever rebuttal of the arguments against public support for internal improvements advanced by Democrat Field.

At the close of the convention, Bates delivered the final speech. No complete record of this speech was made, for once Bates began speaking, the reporters, Weed confessed, were "too intent and absorbed as listeners, to think of Reporting." "No account that can now be given will do it justice," Horace Greeley wrote in the *New York Tribune* the following week. In clear, compelling language, Bates described the country poised at a dangerous crossroad "between sectional disruption and unbounded prosperity." He called on the various regions of the nation to speak in "voices of moderation and compromise, for only by statesmanlike concession could

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"the American system," as it came to be called, coalesced behind Henry Clay's Whig Party.

Weed's star rose rapidly in New York when, with Seward's help, he launched the *Albany Evening Journal*, first published in March 1830. The influential *Journal*, which eventually became the party organ for the Whigs (and later, for the Republicans), gave Weed a powerful base from which he would brilliantly shape public opinion for nearly four decades. Through his newspapers, Weed engineered Seward's first chance for political office. In September 1830, Seward secured the nomination for a seat in the state senate from the seventh district. That November, with Weed managing every step of the campaign, Seward won a historic victory as the youngest member to enter the New York Senate. He was twenty-nine.

Albany had nearly doubled in size since Seward had first seen it, but it was still a small town of 24,000 inhabitants. Originally settled by the Dutch, the state's capital boasted a stately array of brick mansions that belonged to wealthy merchant princes. The year before Seward's arrival, ground had been broken for the country's "first steam-powered railroad." This sixteen-mile track connecting Albany with Schenectady was "the first link in an eventual nationwide web of tracks."

The legislature consisted of 32 senators and 128 representatives, most of whom boarded in either the Eagle Tavern on South Market Street or around the corner on State Street, at Bemont's Hotel. Such close quarters, while congenial to politicians, were ill suited to families—especially those, like Seward's, with small children. Consequently, Seward decided to attend the four-month winter session alone.

"Weed is very much with me, and I enjoy his warmth of feeling," Seward confided to Frances after he had settled into Bemont's, describing his friend as "one of the greatest politicians of the age . . . the magician whose wand controls and directs" the party. Despite Weed's eminence, Seward proudly noted, he "sits down, stretches one of his long legs out to rest on my coal-box, I cross my own, and, puffing the smoke of our cigars into each other's faces, we talk of everything, and everybody, except politics." They enjoyed a mutual love of the theater and a passion for the novels of Charles Dickens and Walter Scott. Their shared ambition, for each other and their country, became a common bond that would keep their friendship alive until the end of their days.

Seward's gregarious nature was in perfect harmony with the clublike atmosphere of the boardinghouses, where colleagues took their daily meals together and spent evenings in one another's quarters gathered by the fire. "My room is a thoroughfare," he told Frances. Early in the session, he be-

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friended an older colleague, Albert Haller Tracy, a senator from Buffalo who had served three terms in the U.S. Congress and had once been touted as a candidate for vice president. In recent years, however, a series of debilitating illnesses had stalled Tracy's political ambitions and "crushed all his aspirings." In Seward, perhaps, he found a young man who could fulfill the dreams he had once held dear. "I believe Henry tells him everything that passes in his mind," Frances Seward wrote to her sister, Lazette. "He and Henry appear equally in love with each other."

"It shames my manhood that I am so attached to you," Tracy confessed to Seward after several days' absence from Albany. "It is a foolish fondness from which no good can come." His friendship with another colleague, Tracy explained, was "just right, it fills my heart exactly, but yours crowds it producing a kind of girlish impatience which one can neither dispose of nor comfortably endure . . . every day and almost every hour since [leaving] I have suffered a womanish longing to see you. But all this is too ridiculous for the subject matter of a letter between two grave Senators, and I'll leave unsaid three fourths of what I have been dreaming on since I left Albany."

Seward at first reciprocated Tracy's feelings, professing a "rapturous joy" in discovering that his friend shared the "feelings which I had become half ashamed for their effeminancy to confess I possessed." In time, however, Tracy's intensity began to wear on the relationship. When Seward did not immediately respond to one of his letters, Tracy penned a petulant note. "My feelings confined in narrow channels have outstripped yours which naturally are more diffused—I was foolish enough to make an almost exclusive attachment the measure for one which is . . . divided with many."

Tracy's ardor would fuel an intense rivalry with Thurlow Weed. "Weed has never been to see us since Tracy came," Frances told her sister during a visit to Albany. "I am sorry for this although I can hardly account for it." Confronted with the need to choose, Seward turned to Weed, not Tracy, for vital collaboration. Although Tracy continued a cordial association with Seward, he harbored a smoldering resentment over Seward's increasing closeness to Weed. "Love—cruel tyrant as he is," Tracy reminded Seward, "has made reciprocity both the bond and aliment of our most hallowed affections." Absent that reciprocity, Tracy warned, it would be impossible to sustain the glorious friendship that they had once enjoyed.

A strange turn in Tracy's affections likely resulted from his mounting sense of distance from Seward. He transferred his unrequited love from Henry to Frances, who also was feeling distant from her husband. Though still deeply in love after ten years of marriage, Frances worried that her

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husband's passion for politics and worldly achievement surpassed his love for his family. She mourned "losing my influence over a heart I once thought so entirely my own," increasingly apprehensive that she and her husband were "differently constituted."

In 1832, Seward convinced Frances to accompany him to Albany for the legislative session that ran from January to March. Their quarters on the first floor of Bemont's Hotel were just below those taken by Tracy and his wife, Harriet. The two couples would often spend evenings or weekends together, and Tracy often tagged along with Henry and Frances when his wife was on one of her frequent trips to their home in Buffalo. He joined them on walks, shopping trips, and excursions with the children. "He is a singular being," Frances confided to Lazette. "He certainly knows more than any man I ever was acquainted with." His conversation, she marveled, "reminds me of a book of synonyms. He hardly ever makes use of the same words to express ideas that have a shade of difference."

Capitalizing on Frances's hunger for companionship, Tracy insinuated himself into the private emotional world she once shared only with her husband. He spoke with her freely about his quarrels with his wife. He invited her into his sitting room to read poetry and study French. They talked about their battles with ill health. "I believe at present he could convince me that a chameleon was blue, green or black just as he should choose," Frances admitted to Lazette. Following one extended absence, Frances announced unabashedly that she was "very glad to see him as I love him very much." Though there is no indication that Frances and Tracy ever shared a physical relationship, they had entered into something that was considered, in the subtle realm of Victorian social mores, almost as shameful and inappropriate—a private emotional intimacy.

The following summer, Seward left his wife and family in Auburn to accompany his father on a three-month voyage to Europe. While his aging father's need for companionship provided a rationale for the sojourn, Seward relished the opportunity to see foreign lands and observe new cultures. Father and son traveled extensively through England, Ireland, Holland, Switzerland, Italy, and France. "What a romance was this journey that I was making!" Seward recalled years later. Everywhere he went, however, his thoughts returned to America and his faith in his country's unique future.

"It is not until one visits old, oppressed, suffering Europe, that he can appreciate his own government," he observed, "that he realizes the fearful responsibility of the American people to the nations of the whole earth, to carry successfully through the experiment . . . that men are capable of self-government." He hungrily sought out American newspapers in library

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dampened. The campaign, complete with slogans and songs, was a lively affair. To counter charges that the boyish, red-haired Seward was too young for high office, the Whigs offered a gallery of historical figures who had achieved greatness in their youth, including Charlemagne, Napoleon, Lafayette, Mozart, Newton, and, of course, Whig leader Henry Clay himself. Seward anticipated victory until the final votes were tallied over a three-day period in November 1834.

Defeat shook the usually buoyant Seward to the core. He began to reevaluate his present life, his marriage, and his future. Obliged to return to Albany that December for the final session of the state senate, where he was a lame duck, he fell into an uncharacteristic state of melancholy. Unable to sleep, Seward feared that his consuming ambition, which had kept him away from his wife and children for months, had jeopardized his marriage.

"What a demon is this ambition," he lamented from Albany, baring his soul in a long, emotional letter to his wife. Ambition had led him to stray, he now realized, "in thought, purpose, communion and sympathy from the only being who purely loves me." He confessed that he had thought her love only "an incident" among his many passions, when, in truth, it was "the chief good" of his life. This realization, he feared, had come too late "to win back" her love: "I banished you from my heart. I made it so desolate, so destitute of sympathy for you, of everything which you ought to have found there, that you could no longer dwell in it, and when the wretched T. [Tracy] took advantage of my madness and offered sympathies, and feelings and love such as I [never did], and your expelled heart was half won by his falsehoods. . . . God be praised for the escape of both of us from that fearful peril. . . . Loved, injured and angel spirit, receive this homage of my first return to reason and truth—say to me that understanding my own feelings, yours are not crushed."

Failing to receive an immediate reply from Frances, Seward tossed in his bed. He felt cold, clammy, and feverish. For the first time, the possibility occurred to him that his wife might have fallen out of love, and he was horrified. "I am growing womanish in fears," he admitted in a second heartfelt letter. "Tell me in your own dear way that I am loved and cherished in your heart as I used to be when I better deserved so happy a lot."

Finally, Seward received the answer he longed to hear. "You reproach yourself dear Henry with too much severity," Frances wrote. "Never in those times when I have wept the most bitterly over the decay of my young dreams . . . have I thought you otherwise than good and kind. . . . When I realized most forcibly that 'love is the whole history of woman and but an episode in the life of man' . . . even then I imputed it not to you as a fault

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but reproached myself for wishing to exact a return for affections which I felt were too intense." She assured him that "the love of another" could never bring her "consolation"—God had kept her "in the right path."

By return mail Seward pledged that he desired nothing but to return home, to share the family duties and read by the fireside on the long winter nights, "to live for you and for our dear boys," to be "a partner in your thoughts and cares and feelings." With Frances to support him, Seward promised to renew his Episcopal faith and attempt to find his way to God. He was "count[ing] with eagerness," he concluded, "the hours which intervene between this period and the time when that life will commence."

As Seward took leave of the many friends he had made in his four years in Albany, he decided against confronting Tracy. The day before his scheduled departure, however, a curious letter from his old friend provoked an immediate response. The letter opened with halcyon recollections of the early days of their acquaintance, when Tracy still possessed "golden dreams, of a devoted, peculiar friendship. How much I suffered," he wrote, "when I was first awakened to the perception that these were only dreams. . . . For this you are no way responsible. You loved me as much as you could . . . but it was less far less than I hoped." He explained that "this pain, this disappointment is my excuse for the capriciousness, and too frequent unkindness which I have displayed towards you."

In an emotional reply, Seward explained that Tracy misunderstood completely the nature of the "alienation" that had befallen them. "Availing yourself of the relation existing between us," Seward charged, "you did with or without premeditated purpose what as a man of honor you ought not to have done—pursued a course of conduct which but for the virtue and firmness of the being dearest to me" would have destroyed his entire family. Seward related his initial reluctance to read the letters Frances had surrendered to him; and his conclusion, after reading them, that Tracy "had failed to do me the injury you recklessly contemplated.

"Thenceforth Tracy," he wrote, "you lost that magic influence you once possessed over me. . . . You still have my respect as a man of eminent talents and of much virtue but you can never again be the friend of my secret thoughts. I part without anger, but without affection." Even at this heavy moment, Seward remained the consummate politician, unwilling to burn his bridges completely.

If Seward believed the crisis with Frances had forever muted the voice of his public ambitions with a contented domesticity, he was mistaken. No sooner had he returned to Auburn than he admitted to a friend: "It is seldom that persons who enjoy intervals of public life are happy in their periods of seclusion." Within days, he was writing to Weed, pleading with his

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While Seward focused on the economic and political depredations of slavery, Frances responded to the human plight of the enslaved men, women, and children she encountered along the journey. "We are told that we see slavery here in its mildest form," she wrote her sister. But "disguise thyself as thou wilt, still, slavery, thou art a bitter draught." She could not stop thinking of the "wrongs of this injured race."

One day Frances stopped the carriage to converse with an old blind slave woman, who was at work "turning the ponderous wheel of a machine" in a yard. The work was hard, but she had to do something, she explained, "and this is all I can do now, I am so old." When Frances asked about her family, she revealed that her husband and all her children had been sold long ago to different owners and she had never heard from any of them again. This sad encounter left a lasting impression on Frances. She recorded the interview in detail, and later read it out loud to family and friends in Auburn.

A few days afterward, the Sewards came across a group of slave children chained together on the road outside of Richmond. Henry described the sorrowful scene: "Ten naked little boys, between six and twelve years old, tied together, two and two, by their wrists, were all fastened to a long rope, and followed by a tall, gaunt white man, who, with his long lash, whipped up the sad and weary little procession, drove it to the horse-trough to drink, and thence to a shed, where they lay down on the ground and sobbed and moaned themselves to sleep." The children had been purchased from different plantations that day and were on their way to be auctioned off at Richmond.

Frances could not endure to continue the journey. "Sick of slavery and the South," she wrote in her diary; "the evil effects constantly coming before me and marring everything." She begged her husband to cancel the rest of their tour, and he complied. Instead of continuing south to Richmond, they "turned their horses' heads northward and homeward." For decades afterward, indelible images of Southern poverty and the misery of enslaved blacks would strengthen Seward's hostility to slavery and mold Frances's powerful social conscience.

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WHEN SEWARD RETURNED to Auburn, a lucrative opportunity beckoned. The Holland Land Company, which held more than three hundred thousand acres of undeveloped land in western New York, was searching for a manager to parcel the land and negotiate contracts and deeds with prospective settlers. The company offered Seward a multiyear contract

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with an annual salary of $5,000 plus a share in the profits. Though accepting the position meant he would reside for months at a time in Chautauqua County, more than a hundred miles from his family and home in Auburn, Seward did not hesitate.

He took a leave from his law firm and rented a five-bedroom house in Westfield, "more beautiful than you can have an idea," hopeful that his wife and family would join him during the summer months. In the meantime, he invited Weed's seventeen-year-old daughter, Harriet, to keep Frances company in Auburn, and to help with the two boys and their new baby girl, Cornelia, born in August 1836.

Seward soon found the land-developing business more engaging than law. The six young clerks he hired quickly became a surrogate domestic circle, though he assured Frances in his nightly letters that he missed her and his children terribly. Once more he reiterated how he yearned for the day when they would read aloud to each other by the fire. He had just finished and enjoyed three of Scott's Waverley novels, but "there are a thousand things in them, as in Shakespeare, that one may enjoy more and much longer if one has somebody to converse with while dwelling upon them." His children pined for him and the vibrant life his presence brought to the household. More than a half century later, his son Fred "so vividly remembered" one particular evening when his father read aloud from the works of Scott and Burns that he realized "it must have been a rare event."

Life in Westfield, meanwhile, settled into a pleasant routine. So long as Seward kept intact the image of his happy home in Auburn, he could fully immerse himself in new adventure elsewhere. His serenity was shattered when his little girl contracted smallpox and died in January 1837. Returning home for three weeks, he begged Frances, who had plunged into depression, to come back with him to Westfield. She refused to leave her two boys and "did not think it would be quite right to take them both from their Grandpa."

Back in Westfield, Seward wrote anxiously to Frances that the "lightness that was in all my heart when I thought of you and your sanctuary, and those who surrounded you there, was the main constituent of my cheerfulness." But now "I imagine you sitting alone, drooping, desponding, and unhappy; and, when I think of you in this condition, I cannot resist the sorrow that swells within me. If I could be with you, to lure you away to more active pursuits, to varied study, or more cheerful thoughts, I might save you for yourself, for your children, for myself."

The following summer, Frances was finally persuaded to join him in Westfield. In an exultant letter to Weed, Seward expressed his content-

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ment. "Well, I am here for once, enjoying the reality of dreams," he wrote. "I read much, I ride some, and stroll more along the lake-shore. My wife and children are enjoying a measure of health which enables them to participate in these pleasures." He lacked but one thing to complete his happiness: "If you were here," he told Weed, "we would enjoy pleasures that would have seduced Cicero and his philosophic friends from Tusculum."

While Frances enjoyed her summer, she was unable to share her husband's great contentment. Returning to Auburn in September, she told Harriet Weed she had "found Westfield a very pleasant little village . . . but it was not my *home* and you can very well understand that I am more happy to be here—There is a sort of satisfaction, melancholy it is, in being once more in the room where my darling babe lived and died—in looking over her little wardrobe—in talking with those who missed and loved her."

By the fall of 1837, an economic slump had spread westward to Chautauqua County. This "panic" of 1837 brought widespread misery in its wake—bankrupt businesses, high unemployment, a run on banks, plummeting real estate values, escalating poverty. "I am almost in despair," Seward wrote home. "I have to dismiss three clerks; they all seem near to me as children, and are almost as helpless."

Once again, fortune smiled upon Seward in uncanny fashion. Because Democrats were blamed for the depression, the shrinking economy enlarged his party's political prospects. In the elections that fall, the Whigs swept the state. "There is such a buzz of 'glorious Whig victories' ringing in my ears," Seward wrote Weed, "that I hardly have time to think." Replying from Albany, where he was back in control, Weed was jubilant. "I have been two days endeavoring to snatch a moment for communion with you, to whom my heart always turns in joy or grief. . . . It is a great triumph—an overwhelming revolution. May that Providence which has given us deliverance, give us also wisdom to turn our power into healthful channels."

In the months that followed, Seward and Weed worked together to broaden the Whig Party beyond its base of merchants, industrialists, and prosperous farmers. Hoping to appeal to the masses of workingmen, who had generally voted Democratic since Andrew Jackson's day, Weed raised money for a new partisan weekly. Horace Greeley was chosen editor for the fledgling journal. The slight, rumpled-looking, nearsighted young Greeley occupied a garret in New York where he had edited a small magazine called *The New Yorker*. The new partisan weekly became an instant success, eventually evolving into the powerful *New York Tribune*. For nearly a quarter of a century, Weed, Seward, and Greeley collaborated to build

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Northern expansion. In particular, he proposed to reform the school system, where the virulently anti-Catholic curriculum frightened immigrants away, dooming vast numbers to illiteracy, poverty, and vice. To get these children off the streets and provide them with opportunities to advance, Seward hoped to divert some part of the public school funds to support parochial schools where children could receive instruction from members of their own faith.

Seward's school proposal provoked a violent reaction among nativist Protestants. They accused him of plotting "to overthrow republican institutions" by undoing the separation of church and state. Handbills charged that Seward was "in league with the Pope" and schemed to throw Protestant children into the hands of priests. In the end, the legislature passed a compromise plan that simply expanded the public school system. But the nativists, whose strength would grow dramatically in the decades ahead, never forgave Seward. Indeed, their opposition would eventually prove a fatal stumbling block to Seward's hopes for the presidential nomination in 1860.

If Seward's progressive policies on education and immigration made him an influential and controversial figure in New York State, his defiant stand against slavery in the "Virginia Case" brought him into national prominence in the late 1830s and early 1840s. In September 1839, a vessel sailing from Norfolk, Virginia, to New York was found to have carried a fugitive slave. The slave was returned to his master in Virginia in compliance with Article IV, Section 2, of the U.S. Constitution that persons held to service or labor in one state escaping into another should be delivered up to the owner. When Virginia also demanded the arrest and surrender of three free black seamen who had allegedly conspired to hide the slave on the vessel, the New York governor refused.

In a statement that brought condemnation throughout the South, Seward argued that the seamen were charged with a crime that New York State did not recognize: people were not property, and therefore no crime had been committed. On the contrary, "the universal sentiment of civilized nations" considered helping a slave escape from bondage "not only innocent, but humane and praiseworthy."

As controversy over the fate of the three sailors was prolonged, the Commonwealth of Virginia enacted a series of retaliatory measures to damage the commerce of New York, calling upon other Southern states to pass resolutions denouncing Seward and the state of New York for "intermeddling" with their time-honored "domestic institutions." Democratic periodicals in the North warned that the governor's stance would compromise highly profitable New York trade connections with Virginia and

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other slave states. Seward was branded "a bigoted New England fanatic." This only emboldened Seward's resolve to press the issue. He spurred the Whig-dominated state legislature to pass a series of antislavery laws affirming the rights of black citizens against seizure by Southern agents, guaranteeing a trial by jury for any person so apprehended, and prohibiting New York police officers and jails from involvement in the apprehension of fugitive slaves.

Such divisive incidents—the "new irritation" foreseen by Jefferson in 1820—widened the schism between North and South. Though few slaves actually escaped to the North each year—an estimated one or two hundred out of the millions held in bondage—the issue exacerbated rancor on both sides. In the North, William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper, the *Liberator*, called for immediate emancipation and racial equality, denouncing slavery as sinful and inhumane, advocating "all actions, even in defiance of the Constitution," to bring an end to *"The Empire of Satan."* Such scathing criticisms moved Southern leaders to equally fierce defenses. They proclaimed slavery a "positive good" rather than a mere necessity, of immense benefit to whites and blacks alike. As discord between North and South escalated, many Northerners turned against the abolitionists. Fear that the movement would destroy the Union incited attacks on abolitionist printers in the North and West. Presses were burned, editors threatened with death should their campaign persist.

In 1840, Seward was reelected governor, but by a significantly smaller margin. His dwindling support was blamed on the parochial school controversy, the protracted fight with Virginia, and a waning enthusiasm for social reform. Horace Greeley editorialized that Seward would "henceforth be honored more for the three thousand votes he has lost, considering the causes, than for all he has received in his life." Nonetheless, Seward decided not to run a third time: "All that can now be worthy of my ambition," he explained to a friend, "is to leave the State better for my having been here, and to entitle myself to a favorable judgment in its history."

Throughout the dispute with the state of Virginia, and every other controversy that threatened Seward's highly successful tenure, Weed had proved a staunch ally and friend, answering critics in the legislature, publishing editorials in the *Albany Evening Journal*, ever sustaining Seward's spirits. "What am I to deserve such friendship and affection?" Seward asked him in 1842 as his second term drew to its close. "Without your aid how hopeless would have been my prospect of reaching the elevation from which I am descending. How could I have sustained myself there . . . how could I have secured the joyous reflections of this hour, what would have

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her house and children were her entire world, she never flinched when retaliation against Seward's decision threatened her family. She remained steadfast throughout. Then in her early forties, she was a handsome woman, despite the hard, drawn look imparted by ill health. Over the years she had grown intellectually with her husband, sharing his passion for reading, his reformer's spirit, and his deep hatred of slavery. Defying her father and her neighbors, she sat in the courtroom each day, her quiet bearing lending strength to her husband.

Seward spent weeks investigating the case, interviewing Freeman's family, and summoning five doctors who testified to the prisoner's extreme state of mental illness. In his summation, he pleaded with the jury not to be influenced by the color of the accused man's skin. "He is still your brother, and mine. . . . Hold him then to be a man." Seward continued, "I am not the prisoner's lawyer . . . I am the lawyer for society, for mankind, shocked beyond the power of expression, at the scene I have witnessed here of trying a maniac as a malefactor." He argued that Freeman's conduct was "unexplainable on any principle of *sanity*," and begged the jury not to seek the death sentence. Commit him to an asylum for the term of his natural life, Seward urged: "there is not a *white* man or *white* woman who would not have been dismissed long since from the perils of such a prosecution."

There was never any doubt that the local jury would return a guilty verdict. "In due time, gentlemen of the jury," Seward concluded, "when I shall have paid the debt of nature, my remains will rest here in your midst, with those of my kindred and neighbors. It is very possible they may be unhonored, neglected, spurned! But, perhaps years hence, when the passion and excitement which now agitate this community shall have passed away, some wandering stranger, some lone exile, some Indian, some negro, may erect over them a humble stone, and thereon this epitaph, 'He was Faithful!' " More than a century afterward, visitors to Seward's grave at the Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn would find those very words engraved on his tombstone.

While Seward endured the hostility of his hometown, his defense of Freeman became famous throughout the country. His stirring summation was printed in dozens of newspapers and reprinted in pamphlet form for still wider distribution. Salmon Chase, himself a leading proponent of the black man's cause, conceded to his abolitionist friend Lewis Tappan that he esteemed Seward as "one of the very first public men of our country. Who but himself would have done what he did for that poor wretch Freeman?" His willingness to represent Freeman, Chase continued, "considering his own personal position & the circumstances, was magnanimous in the highest degree."

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So in the mid-1840s, as Seward settled back into private life in Auburn, his optimism about the future remained intact. He had established a national reputation based upon principle and a vision of national progress. He trusted that when his progressive principles once more gained favor with the masses, he would return to public life.

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN, like Seward and Bates, was drawn to politics in his early years. At the age of twenty-three, after only six months in New Salem, Illinois, he decided to run for the state legislature from Sangamon County. While it must have seemed next to impossible that a new settler who had just arrived in town with no family connections and little formal education could compete for office, his belief in himself and awareness of his superior intellectual abilities proved to be powerful motivators. Both his ambition and his uncertainty are manifest in the March 1832 statement formally announcing his candidacy on an essentially Whig platform that called for internal improvements, public education, and laws against usury: "Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition," he wrote. "I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem. How far I shall succeed in gratifying this ambition, is yet to be developed."

Lincoln already possessed the lifelong dream he would restate many times in the years that followed—the desire to prove himself worthy, to be held in great regard, to win the veneration and respect of his fellow citizens. "I am young and unknown to many of you," he continued. "I was born and have ever remained in the most humble walks of life. I have no wealthy or popular relations to recommend me. My case is thrown exclusively upon the independent voters of this county, and if elected they will have conferred a favor upon me, for which I shall be unremitting in my labors to compensate. But if the good people in their wisdom shall see fit to keep me in the background, I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined." At the same time he made it clear that this try would not be his last, telling voters that only after being defeated "some 5 or 6 times" would he feel disgraced and "never to try it again."

His campaign was interrupted when he joined the militia to fight against the Sac and Fox Indians in what became known as the Black Hawk War. Mustered out after three months, he returned home shortly before the election. Not surprisingly, when the votes were tallied, the little-known Lincoln had lost the election. Despite his defeat, he took pride that in his own small town of New Salem, where he "made friends everywhere

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he went," he had received 277 of the 300 votes cast. This astonishing level of support was attributed to his good nature and the remarkable gift for telling stories that had made him a favorite of the men who gathered each night in the general store to share opinions and gossip. "This was the only time," Lincoln later asserted, that he "was ever beaten on a direct vote of the people." Two years later, he ran for the seat a second time. By then he had widened his set of acquaintances beyond New Salem and won easily, capturing the first of four successive terms in the state legislature. Until he joined the new Republican Party, Lincoln would remain a steadfast Whig—as were Seward, Bates, and, for a brief moment, Chase.

Lincoln's four successful campaigns for the legislature were conducted across a sparsely populated frontier county the size of Rhode Island. Young Lincoln was "always the centre of the circle where ever he was," wrote Robert Wilson, a political colleague. "His Stories . . . were fresh and Sparkling. never tinctured with malevolence." Though his face, in repose, revealed nothing "marked or Striking," when animated by a story, "Several wrinkles would diverge from the inner corners of his eyes, and extend down and diagonally across his nose, his eyes would Sparkle, all terminating in an unrestrained Laugh in which every one present willing or unwilling were compelled to take part." This rapid illumination of Lincoln's features in conversation would be observed by countless others throughout his entire life, drawing many into his orbit.

During the campaigns, candidates journeyed on horseback across "entirely unoccupied" prairies, speaking at country stores and small villages. "The Speaking would begin in the forenoon," Wilson recalled, "the candidates Speaking alternately until all who could Speak had his turn, generally consuming the whole afternoon." Nor were the contests limited to speeches on public issues. At Mr. Kyle's store, west of Springfield, a group of Democrats made a wager. " 'See here Lincoln, if you can throw this Cannon ball further than we Can, We'll vote for you.' Lincoln picked up the large Cannon ball—felt it—swung it around—and around and said, 'Well, boys if thats all I have to do I'll get your votes.' " He then proceeded to swing the cannonball "four or Six feet further than any one Could throw it."

When he moved to Springfield in 1837, Lincoln began to attract the circle of friends and admirers who would play a decisive role in his political ascent. While he worked during the day to build his law practice, evenings would find him in the center of Springfield's young men, gathered around a fire in Speed's store to read newspapers, gossip, and engage in philosophical debates. "They came there," Speed recalled, "because they were sure to find Lincoln," who never failed to entertain with his remarkable stories.

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In these early years, however, Lincoln paid the slavery issue less attention than Seward or Chase, believing that so long as slavery could be restricted to places where it already existed, it would gradually become extinct. He did not share Chase's professional and personal aversion to slaveowners and did not hesitate to take whatever clients came his way. In the course of his practice, Lincoln defended both slaveowners and fugitive slaves. While he hated to see fugitive slaves hunted down, he publicly criticized the governor of Maine when he, like Seward, refused to give up two men who had aided a fugitive slave from Georgia. For Lincoln, the constitutional requirements for the return of fugitive slaves could not be evaded.

Lincoln's dreams of becoming the DeWitt Clinton of Illinois collapsed when a sustained recession hit the state in 1837. Public sentiment turned against the costly and still-unfinished internal improvements system. For months, Lincoln fervently defended the system against the rising tide of criticism, likening the abandonment of the canal to "stopping a skift in the middle of a river—if it was not going up, it *would* go down." Although his arguments fell on deaf ears, he refused to give ground, abiding by his father's old maxim: "If you make a bad bargain, *hug* it the tighter." His unwillingness to abandon the policies he had championed became self-destructive stubbornness. By 1840, the fourth year of recession, the mood in the legislature was set against continuing these projects. With funds no longer forthcoming, the improvements system collapsed. The state bank was forced to liquidate. Land values fell precipitously, and new pioneers were deterred from emigrating to Illinois.

As a vocal proponent of the system that had aggravated the state's fiscal catastrophe, Lincoln received a significant share of the blame. Though he managed to win a fourth term in 1840, he polled the least number of votes among the victorious candidates, his poorest showing since his first election. Belief in himself and his progressive agenda shaken, he resolved to retire from the legislature after his term was completed.

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THIS FAILURE of Lincoln's political ambition coincided with a series of crises in his personal life. Despite his humor, intellectual passion, and oratorical eloquence, he had always been awkward and self-conscious in the presence of women. "He was not very fond of girls," his stepmother remembered. His gangly appearance and uncouth behavior did little to recommend him to the ladies. "He would burst into a ball," recalled a friend, "with his big heavy Conestoga boots on, and exclaim aloud—'Oh—boys, how clean those girls look.' " This was undoubtedly not the compliment the girls were looking for. Lincoln's friend Henry Whitney provides a

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his concentration and purpose. He would be responsible for the life and happiness of a woman accustomed to wealth and luxury; he would be unable to read late into the nights, pursuing new knowledge and the mastery of law and politics.

His fear that marriage might hinder his career was a common one. The uncertainties of establishing a legal practice in the new-market economy of the mid-nineteenth century caused many young lawyers to delay wedlock, driving up the marriage age. The Harvard law professor Joseph Story is famously quoted as saying that the law "is a jealous mistress, and requires a long and constant courtship." What applied to the law applied still more to politics. For Lincoln, struggling to establish himself in both, marriage must have presented pitfalls for his enormous ambitions.

Lincoln drafted a letter to Mary ending the engagement. He asked Speed to deliver it, but Speed refused, warning that he should talk to her instead, for "once put your words in writing and they Stand as a living & eternal Monument against you." Lincoln did go to see Mary and, according to Speed, told her that he did not love her. As soon as she began to weep, he lost his nerve. "To tell you the truth Speed, it was too much for me. I found the tears trickling down my own cheeks. I caught her in my arms and kissed her." The engagement was temporarily renewed, and Lincoln was forced into another meeting to sever the engagement. This second confrontation left him devastated—both because he had hurt Mary and because he had long held his "ability to keep [his] resolves when they are made . . . as the only, or at least the chief, gem of [his] character."

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DURING THIS GRIM WINTER, sorrows came to Lincoln "not single spies/But in battalions." Joshua Speed announced his intention to return in a few months' time to his family's plantation in Louisville, Kentucky. Speed's father had died, and he felt responsible for his grieving mother. On January 1, 1841, he sold his interest in the general store where he had lived and worked for seven years. Speed's departure would bring an end to the pleasant evenings around the fireplace, where the young men of Springfield had gathered to discuss politics. More discouraging for Lincoln, Speed's departure meant the loss of the one friend to whom he had opened his heart in free and easy communion. "I shall be verry lonesome without you," Lincoln told Speed. "How miserably things seem to be arranged in this world. If we have no friends, we have no pleasure; and if we have them, we are sure to lose them, and be doubly pained by the loss."

The awkward dissolution of his engagement to Mary and the anticipated loss of his best friend combined with the collapse of the internal im-

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provement projects and the consequent damage to his reputation to induce a state of mourning that deepened for weeks. He stopped attending the legislature and withdrew from the lively social life he had enjoyed. His friends worried that he was suicidal. According to Speed, "Lincoln went Crazy—had to remove razors from his room—take away all Knives and other such dangerous things—&c—it was terrible." He was "delirious to the extent of not knowing what he was doing," Orville Browning recalled, and for a period of time was incapable of talking coherently. "Poor L!" James Conkling wrote to his future wife, Mercy Ann Levering; "he is reduced and emaciated in appearance and seems scarcely to possess strength enough to speak above a whisper. His case at present is truly deplorable."

In Lincoln's time, this combination of symptoms—feelings of hopelessness and listlessness, thoughts of death and suicide—was called hypochondriasis ("the hypo") or "the vapours." Its source was thought to be in the hypochondria, that portion of the abdomen which was then considered the seat of emotions, containing the liver, gallbladder, and spleen. Treatment for the liver and digestive system was recommended.

"I have, within the last few days, been making a most discreditable exhibition of myself in the way of hypochondriaism," Lincoln confessed to his law partner and friend John Stuart on January 20, 1841. Desperately, he sought a post office job for Dr. Anson Henry, who would leave Springfield if the job did not materialize. His presence, Lincoln told Stuart, was "necessary to my existence."

Three days later, Lincoln wrote Stuart again. "I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on the earth. Whether I shall ever be better I can not tell; I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better, it appears to me."

Hoping medical treatment might assuage his sorrow, Lincoln consulted not only Dr. Henry but Dr. Daniel Drake at the medical college in Cincinnati; Drake was perhaps the most eminent medical scientist in the West. Lincoln described his condition at length in a letter and asked for counsel. The doctor wisely replied that he could not offer a diagnosis for Lincoln "without a personal interview."

Throughout the nadir of Lincoln's depression, Speed stayed at his friend's side. In a conversation both men would remember as long as they lived, Speed warned Lincoln that if he did not rally, he would most certainly die. Lincoln replied that he was more than willing to die, but that he had "done nothing to make any human being remember that he had lived, and that to connect his name with the events transpiring in his day and

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companionship not only of her widowed father but of three generations of women living in the same household—her favorite aunt, Cornelia; her sister and closest friend, Lazette, who spent months at a time in the Auburn house; and her beloved daughter, Fanny. Likewise, Julia Bates was surrounded by her children, several of whom continued to live with the family even after they married; and by her parents; her sisters; her brothers; and her husband's mother, all of whom lived nearby.

If Mary's solitary life with her husband brought hardship, the birth of two sons within the first forty months of their marriage brought great happiness. Both boys were high-spirited, intelligent, and dearly loved by their parents. In later years, Mary proudly noted that Lincoln was "the kindest—most tender and loving husband & father in the world. . . . Said to me always when I asked him for any thing—You know what you want—go and get it. He never asked me if it was necessary."

He was, by all accounts, a gentle and indulgent father who regularly took the boys on walks around the neighborhood, played with them in the house, and brought them to his office while he worked. While Herndon believed that Lincoln was too indulgent, that the children "litterally ran over him," leaving him "powerless to withstand their importunities," Lincoln maintained that children should be allowed to grow up without a battery of rules and restrictions. "It is my pleasure that my children are free—happy and unrestrained by paternal tyrrany," Mary recalled his saying. "Love is the chain whereby to lock a child to its parent."

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WHEN, AT LAST, Illinois began to emerge from recession, Lincoln's hopes for a future in politics revived. "Now if you should hear any one say that Lincoln don't want to go to Congress," he wrote a friend three months after his marriage, "tell him . . . he is mistaken." His objective was the Seventh Congressional District—including Sangamon County—where the Whigs had a majority in a state that was otherwise solidly Democratic.

Lincoln's first goal was to win the endorsement of the Sangamon County Convention, which would appoint delegates to the congressional district nominating convention. The convention system had just been adopted by the Whigs to unify party members in the general election. "That 'union is strength' is a truth that has been known, illustrated and declared, in various ways and forms in all ages of the world," said Lincoln in support of the new system, pointing out that "he whose wisdom surpasses that of all philosophers, has declared that 'a house divided against itself

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cannot stand.' " Much later, of course, he would famously widen the application of this same biblical phrase beyond Sangamon County Whigs to the nation as a whole.

Lincoln's adversary in his home county was Edward Baker, a close friend after whom he named his second-born son. Despite a vigorous campaign, Lincoln fell short by a narrow margin. "We had a meeting of the whigs of the county here on last monday to appoint delegates to a district convention," Lincoln reported to Speed, "and Baker beat me & got the delegation instructed to go for him." Having been chosen a delegate himself, Lincoln ruefully remarked, "I shall be 'fixed' a good deal like a fellow who is made groomsman to the man what has cut him out, and is marrying his own dear 'gal.' "

Though bound not to oppose Baker in his own county, Lincoln still harbored a lingering hope that he might be nominated by another county, explaining to a friend in neighboring Menard County that his defeat in Sangamon was partially explained by his marriage into the Todd/Edwards clan. "It would astonish if not amuse, the older citizens of your County who twelve years ago knew me a strange[r], friendless, uneducated, penniless boy, working on a flat boat . . . to learn that I have been put down here as the candidate of pride, wealth, and arristocratic family distinction."

At the district convention in Pekin, the nomination went neither to Lincoln nor to Baker but to another young lawyer, John Hardin. At this convention, Lincoln successfully introduced a resolution that Baker would be the next candidate for the U.S. Congress, hoping to establish the idea of rotating terms that would later redound to his benefit. Baker was duly elected two years later, but when his term came to an end, Hardin wanted to return to Congress and was unwilling to yield to Lincoln.

Lincoln left nothing to chance in the contest that followed, seeking to prevent Whig papers from supporting Hardin, pressuring friends to influence neutrals in his favor. He asked friends to share the names of those who were against him. He sent letters to influential Whigs in every precinct. He planned "a quiet trip" through several counties, though he warned his friends, "Dont speak of this, or let it relax any of your vigilance."

His message remained the same throughout the campaign. Hardin and Baker had already served their terms in Congress, and now it was his turn. "That Hardin is talented, energetic, usually generous and magnanimous," he wrote a supporter, "I have, before this, affirmed to you, and do not now deny. You know that my only argument is that 'turn about is fair play.' " He wrote a long letter to Hardin, recalling the old understanding, but insist-

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the Fugitive Slave Law to the free state of Ohio. He argued that as soon as Matilda stepped into Ohio, she acquired the legal right to freedom guaranteed by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which forbade the introduction of slavery into the vast Northwest Territory later occupied by the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan. To many opponents of slavery in later years, including Abraham Lincoln, the Ordinance of 1787 became, like the Declaration of Independence, a sacred document expressing the intent of the founding fathers to confine slavery within the boundaries of the existing states, prohibiting forever its future spread.

"Every settler within the territory, by the very act of settlement, became a party to this compact," Chase argued, "forever entitled to the benefit of its provisions." These provisions, he maintained, "are the birthright of the people of Ohio. It is their glorious distinction, that the genuine principles of American liberty are imbedded, as it were, in their very soil, and mingled with their very atmosphere. . . . Wherever [slavery] exists at all, it exists only in virtue of positive law . . . [and] can have no existence beyond the territorial limits of the state which sanctions it." The right to hold a person in bondage "vanishes when the master and the slave meet together" in a place, like Ohio, "where positive law interdicts slavery."

The conservative judge, as expected, ruled against Chase. The next day, Matilda was forcibly removed to the South and returned to slavery. The philosophical and legal arguments Chase had advanced, however, were considered so important by the antislavery community that they were printed in pamphlet form and distributed throughout the nation.

Publication of his arguments in the *Matilda* case brought Chase immediate acclaim in Northern intellectual circles. By anchoring his arguments firmly in history and law, he opened an antislavery approach that differed from the tactics of the allies of Garrison, who eschewed political organization, dismissed the founding fathers, and considered the Constitution "a covenant with death, an agreement with hell," because it condoned slavery. Where the Garrisonians called for a moral crusade to awaken the sleeping conscience of the nation, Chase targeted a political audience, hopeful that abolition could be achieved through politics, government, and the courts.

The time had come, Chase decided, to try for public office. Though he had not been active in party politics, he sought a nomination from the Whig Party to the state senate. To his disappointment, he was rebuffed as an abolitionist. Three years later, he tried again, seeking the Whig nomination for the Cincinnati City Council. Although he succeeded in gaining office, he was defeated for reelection after a single term, largely due to his position on temperance, which had led him to unpopular votes denying liquor licenses to city establishments.

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Surveying the political landscape, Chase was unable to see a future for himself as either a Democrat or a Whig. Both parties, he wrote, submitted to the South upon the "*vital* question of slavery." Consequently, in 1841, he joined the fledgling Liberty Party, which was struggling to establish a solid base of support. The previous year, James Birney, since moved to New York to head the American Anti-Slavery Society, had gained the party's nomination for president. Unknown beyond abolitionist circles, Birney garnered only 7,000 votes.

Through the 1840s, Chase sought to guide the Liberty Party to a more moderate image so that it could gain wider appeal. Working closely with Gamaliel Bailey, Birney's astute successor at the *Philanthropist*, Chase persuaded the Ohio Liberty Party to adopt a resolution that explicitly renounced any intention "to interfere with slavery in the states where it exists." Concurring with Lincoln, Bates, and a number of progressive Whigs, they pledged to focus only on those areas where slavery was present "without constitutional warrant"—in the District of Columbia, on the high seas, in the new territories. At the same time, Chase encouraged his fellow party members to consider reaching outside their ranks to find a presidential candidate who could command a larger vote than the radical Birney, who, as Chase said, "has seen so little of public service."

In an 1842 letter to Joshua Giddings, the abolitionist congressman from Ohio's Western Reserve, Chase suggested that if John Quincy Adams or William Henry Seward "would accept the nomination, great additional strength might be gained for the party." He had no idea whether either man would accept, but ranked Governor Seward, "for his age," as "one of the first statesmen in the country," while former president Adams was "perhaps, the very first."

Though he had never met Seward, Chase opened an intriguing correspondence with the governor, in which they freely debated the role of third parties. Seward expressed his belief that "there can be only two permanent parties." In his view, the Democratic Party, with its strong base in the South, would always be the party of slavery, while the Whig Party would champion the antislavery banner, "more or less," depending "on the advancement of the public mind and the intentness with which it can be fixed on the question of Slavery." Seward conceded that while he was disheartened by the Whig Party's current "lukewarmness on the Subject of Slavery," he had no choice but to stay with the party he loved, and to hope for a more advanced position in the future. "To abandon a party and friends to whom I owe so much, whose confidence I do in some degree possess," he wrote, "would be criminal, and not more criminal than unwise."

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"very willingly" agreed to represent the elderly farmer, who faced substantial penalties if found guilty. Chase's defense of Van Zandt transcended the particulars of the *Matilda* case, directly challenging the constitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Law. That law, he maintained, deprived fugitives of life and liberty without due process of law. "Under the constitution," he declared, "all the inhabitants of the United States are, without exception, persons,—persons, it may be, not free, persons, held to service . . . but still, persons," and therefore possessed of every right guaranteed under the Constitution and Declaration of Independence.

"What is a slave?" he asked. "A slave is a person held, as property, by legalized force, against natural right. . . . The very moment a slave passes beyond the jurisdiction of the state, in which he is held as such, he ceases to be a slave; not because any law or regulation of the state which he enters confers freedom upon him, but because he *continues* to be a man and *leaves behind* him the law of force, which made him a slave." Chase depicted slavery as "a creature of state law" and not a national institution. He argued that any slave state created after 1787, the year the Northwest Ordinance became law, existed in violation of the Constitution and the wishes of the founding fathers.

As most observers expected, the Cincinnati court refused to accept Chase's argument. Van Zandt was found guilty. As Chase left the courtroom, according to Harriet Beecher Stowe, then a Cincinnati resident, one of the judges reflected on the unpopularity of professed abolitionists: "There goes a young man who has *ruined* himself to-day."

Far from ruining his prospects, the *Van Zandt* case added considerable luster to Chase's national reputation. Appealing the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, Chase enlisted Seward's help as co-counsel. The case moved slowly through the docket, affording the two men time to craft their written arguments. Chase presented the constitutional arguments, while Seward dealt with the technical ones. Though the Southern-dominated court wasted little time in affirming the lower court's ruling, the constitutional arguments Chase outlined became pillars of antislavery party doctrine.

Chase acknowledged that "poor old Van Zandt" was never able to recover from the loss and the damages inflicted upon him. Still, he believed that "even though my poor old client be sacrificed, the great cause of humanity will be a gainer." He had his 108-page argument reprinted in pamphlet form for wide distribution, and was delighted with the positive response it provoked. Antislavery activist Charles Sumner wrote from Massachusetts that "the question under the Ordinance of 1787 was novel" and might well "rally a *political* movement." President John Quincy

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ence of black witnesses. "Every law on the statute book so wrong and mean that it cannot be executed, or felt, if executed, to be oppressive and unjust," averred Chase, "tends to the overthrow of all law, by separating in the minds of the people, the idea of law from the idea of right. . . .

"For myself," Chase concluded, "I am ready to renew my pledge—and I will venture to speak also in behalf of my co-workers,—that we go straight on, without faltering or wavering, until every vestige of oppression shall be erased from the statute book:—until the sun in all his journey from the utmost eastern horizon, through the mid-heaven, till he sinks beyond the western mountains into his ocean bed, shall not behold, in all our broad and glorious land, the foot print of a single slave." A tremendous round of applause was followed by an emotional rendition of the hymn "America." With a benediction, the exercises were brought to a close.

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Chase, unlike Seward and Lincoln, did not make friends easily. A contemporary reporter observed that he knew "little of human nature," and that while "profoundly versed in man, he was profoundly ignorant of men." His abstractedness often lent an air of preoccupation, aggravated by his extreme nearsightedness. Both prevented him from gauging the reactions of others. Furthermore, his natural reserve, piety, temperance, and lack of humor made for uneasy relationships. Even his stately proportions and fastidious dress worked against social intimacy.

Despite his difficulty in making friends and instilling personal loyalties, Chase did form one significant relationship during the decade of the forties. His bond with Edwin M. Stanton would have important consequences during the Civil War, when the two men would serve together in Lincoln's cabinet. Six years younger than Chase, Stanton was a brilliant young lawyer from Steubenville, Ohio. He had been active in Democratic politics from his earliest days. A short, stout man, with thick brows and intense black eyes hidden behind steel-rimmed glasses, Stanton had grown up in a Quaker family dedicated to abolition. He later told the story that "when he was a boy his father had—like the father of Hannibal against Rome—made him swear eternal hostility to slavery."

When Chase and Stanton first met in Columbus in the early 1840s, each was dealing with appalling personal loss, for death had pursued Stanton much as it had pursued Chase. In the five-year span from 1841 to 1846, Stanton had lost his only daughter, Lucy; his young wife, Mary; and his only brother, Darwin. Confronting a similar reign of grief at almost the same time, Chase found in Stanton a solace and friendship more intense than if they had met at a different juncture in their lives.

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In the summer of 1846, Stanton spent several days with Chase at his Cincinnati home. The wide-ranging conversations they enjoyed left a lasting impression on Stanton. "Since our pleasant intercourse together last summer," Stanton wrote Chase, "no living person has been oftener in my mind;—waking or sleeping,—for, more than once, I have dreamed of being with you. The strength of my regard and affection for you, I can, thus, tell more freely than were we face to face."

More than sorrow bound Chase and Stanton together. At the time of their acquaintance in the mid-1840s, both men were trying to find a footing in quick-shifting political currents. Chase had already taken his stand with the Liberty Party. Stanton, though intrigued by the newly formed party, remained a loyal Democrat. Over the course of many hours, in conversation and then by letter, they debated the merits of the new Liberty Party. Responding to Chase's worry about the narrowness of the party's platform, Stanton cited examples of single ideas that had achieved great triumphs: most notably, "Taxation & Representation," the slogan that guided the American Revolution. "I go for one idea in party," he wrote, "and in friendship my one idea is strong & sincere love for you." With Chase, Stanton felt free to criticize the Democratic Party, which had gravely disappointed him in a recent election when its candidate for governor came out in favor of the discriminatory Black Laws.

Chase tried to involve Stanton in the *Van Zandt* appeal, but Stanton declined, fearing he had neither the "physical nor intellectual strength sufficient to engage in the cause. Events of the past summer have broken my spirits, crushed my hopes, and without energy or purpose in life, I feel indifferent to the present, careless of the future." Chase apparently did not reply to this letter. "Many weeks have gone by," Stanton wrote in January 1847, "but your voice reaches me no more. Why is it? The question arises, as I move slowly & disappointed from the post office each day."

The correspondence picked up again in the spring, when Chase sent Stanton his argument in the *Van Zandt* case. "Rejoicing, as I do, to call you friend," Stanton wrote after reading through the lengthy document, "it gives me pleasure to acknowledge its intellectual merit." Rather than discuss it in writing, he hoped that he and Chase could soon meet and "spend two or three days" together. "I want to hear from you," Stanton concluded, "and so may as well confess it at once & throw myself upon your mercy."

They finally met in Cincinnati in July, but the visit was too abbreviated to satisfy Stanton. The desire for his friend's company had been lodged in his heart for so long, Stanton explained to Chase upon returning home to Steubenville, that the visit, while enjoyable, had left him ungratified. In the months that followed, however, they saw each other on a number of occa-

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CHAPTER 4

"PLUNDER & CONQUEST"

WASHINGTON WAS A CITY in progress when the Lincolns arrived at the wooden railroad station in December 1847 for the opening of the congressional session. The cornerstone of the Washington Monument would not be laid until the following summer. Cobblestoned Pennsylvania Avenue was one of only two paved streets. Not yet fitted with its familiar high dome, the Capitol stood on a hill that boasted "a full view of the cities of Washington, Georgetown, and Alexandria, and the varied and forest-clad hills in Maryland and Virginia." In the backs of most houses, recalled one of Lincoln's colleagues, "stood pig-styes, cow-sheds, and pens for the gangs of unyoked geese. During the day the animals and fowls roamed at will in lordly insolence, singly or in herds and flocks, through the streets and over the fields."

Nevertheless, with forty thousand inhabitants (including several thousand slaves), the capital was a metropolis compared to little Springfield. It was filled with the landmarks and memorials of the history that so captivated the Lincolns. Some of the most illustrious personages of the age still walked the halls of Congress—John Quincy Adams tirelessly battling on behalf of antislavery petitions; the eloquent Daniel Webster, whose words, Lincoln believed, would outlive the age; John Calhoun, the acknowledged spokesman for the South, who had already led one effort at rebellion. These titans who had shaped the history of the past decades were joined by those who would play leading roles in the great drama to unfold—Jefferson Davis and Alexander Stephens, future president and vice president of the Confederacy; Stephen Douglas, Lincoln's great rival; and Robert Barnwell Rhett, agitator of rebellion.

The Lincolns took up residence in Mrs. Spriggs's Boarding House on Capitol Hill, on the site of the present Library of Congress. Soon a favorite among his fellow boarders, Lincoln was always ready with a story

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or anecdote to entertain, persuade, or defuse argument. Samuel Busey, a young doctor who took his meals at the boardinghouse, recalled that whenever Lincoln was about to tell a story, "he would lay down his knife and fork, place his elbows upon the table, rest his face between his hands, and begin with the words 'that reminds me,' and proceed. Everybody prepared for the explosions sure to follow."

For recreation, Lincoln took up bowling with his fellow boarders. Though a clumsy bowler, according to Dr. Busey, Lincoln "played the game with great zest and spirit" and "accepted success and defeat with like good nature and humor." When word spread "that he was in the alley there would assemble numbers of people to witness the fun which was anticipated by those who knew of his fund of anecdotes and jokes." As ever, his quick wit and droll geniality provided a source of "merriment" for everyone around him.

While Lincoln attended meetings and congressional sessions, Mary was largely confined to the single room she shared with her husband and two small children—Robert, now five, and Eddie, two, whose often boisterous antics and excited running through the corridors did not endear Mary to her fellow boarders. None of the other congressmen in their boardinghouse were accompanied by wives. Indeed, most of the legislators in the city had left their families behind. Without female friends, Mary was compelled to spend most of the day alone with the children. Furthermore, the mores of the day forbade her to attend social gatherings and parties without her continually occupied husband. After a few months, by mutual consent, Mary and the children left Washington. Unable to return to their Springfield home, which was rented out for the congressional term, she took the children to her father's elegant house in Lexington, Kentucky, beginning what would be the longest continuous separation from her husband in their twenty-three-year marriage.

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EIGHTEEN MONTHS before Abraham Lincoln arrived in Washington, history had taken an irrevocable turn when Democratic president James Polk ordered American troops to occupy disputed territory between the borders of the United States and Mexico. Relations between Mexico and the United States had been strained for decades as quarrels over boundary lines simmered. Announcing that Mexico had fired upon American soldiers on American soil, Polk called on Congress not to declare war but to recognize that a state of war already existed.

The onset of war with Mexico aroused the patriotic spirit of the American people, who regarded the war as "a romantic venture in a distant and

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coln charged, the president had hoped "to escape scrutiny, by fixing the public gaze upon the exceeding brightness of military glory . . . that serpent's eye, that charms to destroy." He went on to liken the president's war message to "the half insane mumbling of a fever-dream." Perhaps recalling the turtles tormented with hot coals by his boyhood friends, Lincoln employed the bizarre simile of the president's confused mind "running hither and thither, like some tortured creature, on a burning surface, finding no position, on which it can settle down, and be at ease."

This maiden effort was not the tone of reasoned debate that later characterized Lincoln's public statements. Nor did it obey his oft-expressed belief that a leader should endeavor to transform, yet heed, public opinion. Compelling as Lincoln's criticisms might have been, they fell flat at a time when the majority of Americans were delighted with the outcome of the war. The Democratic *Illinois State Register* charged that Lincoln had disgraced his district with his "treasonable assault upon President Polk," claimed that "henceforth" he would be known as "Benedict Arnold," and predicted that he would enjoy only a single term. Lincoln sought to clarify his position, arguing that although he had challenged the instigation of the war, he had never voted against supplies for the soldiers. To accept Polk's position without question, he claimed, was to "allow the President to invade a neighboring nation . . . *whenever he may choose to say* he deems it necessary."

Even the loyal Herndon feared that Lincoln's antiwar stance would destroy his political future. "I saw that Lincoln would ruin himself," Herndon later explained. "I wrote to him on the subject again and again." Herndon was right to worry, for as it turned out, Lincoln's quest for distinction had managed only to infuriate the Democrats, worry fainthearted Whigs, and lose support in Illinois, where the war was extremely popular. A prominent Chicago politician, Justin Butterfield, asked if he was against the Mexican War, replied: "no, I opposed one War [the War of 1812]. That was enough for me. I am now perpetually in favor of war, pestilence and famine." In the years ahead, Lincoln would write frequent letters defending his position. If he had hoped for reelection to Congress, however, despite the unofficial agreement with his colleagues that he would serve only one term, his prospects rapidly evaporated in the fever of war. Indeed, when Stephen Logan, the Whig nominee to replace him, was defeated, his loss was blamed on Lincoln.

As Seward understood better than Lincoln, Manifest Destiny was in the air. "Our population," Seward predicted, "is destined to roll its resistless waves to the icy barriers of the north, and to encounter Oriental civilization on the shores of the Pacific." Though he wasn't in favor of the war,

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