

# WHEN LINCOLN WAS A BOY

SAMUEL B. PETTENGILL

**H**AVE YOU ever been alone at night in primeval wilderness? There are not many places now where virgin timber stands untouched by ax or saw.

One such place is Turkey Run State Park in Indiana. I was there one September. It told me something about Lincoln. I pass it on to you.

Toward midnight I went in the woods alone far from sight or sound of the nearest human being. A huge harvest moon in a cloudless sky sent long pencils of light down through the foliage of the forest. The gigantic tulip trees and sycamores stood in a hush of attention as if listening for the remotest whisper from earth or sky. They reached almost as high as an eight-story building before sending off their lowest branches. The massive trunks, glistening in the moonlight, seemed like the columns of some temple of the Egyptians where men worshipped forty centuries ago.

A curious sensation came over me. I felt my utter insignificance – the merest speck in space, and yet, with that feeling of littleness, another quite different. It seemed that I could reach up past that leafy ceiling to the quiet stars; that I could reach down through the cool earth to the roots of those titans of the forest as they sought and found the sap of their sustenance.

The patience of the stars, the calmness of the sleeping earth, the massive strength of those mighty trees, the clean tang of the midnight air, – all these entered through some window I did not

*Mr. Pettengill, noted attorney and author, was formerly a congressman from Indiana.*



know I had. I hope you have all felt these things, if only once in a lifetime.

And then, as I stood there, I thought of Lincoln when he was a little boy in Indiana seven score years ago. It occurred to me, with a significance I had never realized, that when he was a lad it was primeval forest everywhere, not at Turkey Run alone; that every night when he was a little boy and everywhere when he was alone in the woods, he must have sensed those same impalpable presences; that what was to me an unforgettable hour was to him the constant companionship of all his impressionable years.

The friendliness of trees! We have lost something in this age of brick and steel and concrete. Not so in 1816. Trees made the flat boat that gave safe passage across the Ohio to little Abe and his sister Sarah, to his father and Nancy Hanks. Trees made the "half-faced" cabin — open on one side to the bleak weather — where they spent their first Indiana winter. Trees fed the fire that gave them warmth and lighted the pages of the Bible. Trees made for them their bed of leaves. Trees gave them the sugar of the maples, the brown nuts of autumn. Trees drove out the mosquitoes with their pungent log-fire smoke. Trees drove back the wolf and the

panther with their glowing pine knots. Yes, and trees made for them crude chairs, tables, beds, ax-helves, ox-yokes, cradles, coffins. Little Abe with a whipsaw helped fashion one of these pioneer coffins. In its embrace a pioneer woman went "over Jordan."

Trees were friendly things.

"Such were a few of the many, many things the moon might have told little Abe Lincoln, going on eight, on a winter night on Little Pigeon Creek, in the Buckhorn Valley in Southern Indiana — a high quarter-moon with a white shine of thin frost on the long open spaces of the sky." You will find this in Carl Sandburg's "Prairie Years."

And then I thought of how little schooling the world has said Lincoln had — little Abe and Sister Sally tramping hand in hand over rough trails to school — four miles and back — eight miles a day. Not much schooling there for two little children.

But suddenly I felt less sorry for Abraham Lincoln. Everywhere he went were the trees of the primeval forest — tulips, sycamores, oaks, elms, maples, beeches, walnuts. Everywhere that sense of peace, that feeling of being close to God. And I knew then that the statement in the books that Lincoln had little schooling was false, that he

was at school many and many an hour when the boy of today is teacherless, learning the patience and the strength and the toughness and tenderness of trees, a lesson from the great Book of Life that never needs revision.

I understood better then the saying of the pioneers: "The cowards never started and the weak never arrived." I understood the Rail Splitter better and America better in the big timber at Turkey Run. . . .

## OUR MECHANISTIC AGE

### HELPING US—OR MAKING US HELPLESS?

CHARLES A. LINDBERGH

**W**E DWELL in a smaller world, by the scale of clocks; we are more vulnerable to our enemies, more accessible to our friends; we tap previously distant sources of supply. Science has revalued geographical locations, increased the density of populations, and offered its rewards to new knowledges and trades. The houses we own, the meals we eat, the tensions we feel, the skills we teach, differ from those of our forefathers in fundamental ways. Ideals, wealth, and power are all in a state of flux.

When the art of flying was very young, most of us thought that men on wings would soar over mountains and oceans to bring countries close together in peaceful understanding. We assumed that easy contact between peoples would simplify diplomacy, and de-

crease war. Now, at the end of the first half century of engine-driven flight, we are confronted with the stark fact that the historical significance of aircraft has been primarily military and destructive. Our bombs have wiped out, in minutes, an inheritance of life and labor which centuries created. Aviation is having its greatest effect on the force-influence of nations and factors of survival, while diplomatic relationships are floundering in a strange new framework of power, time, and space.

With hindsight we see that our early enthusiasm over the discoveries of science and the conquest of the air blinded us to natural laws which govern the conduct of men.

Man has always had a tendency to complicate his life with techni-