

Making Lincoln President

LINCOLN'S RISE TO POWER. By William E. Baringer. Boston: Little, Brown. 1937. \$4.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

HOW did the Lincoln who was nationally unknown at the beginning of June, 1858, come to be President-elect on the night of November 6, 1860? George Bancroft said in his eulogy after Lincoln's assassination that the finger of God was responsible for his rise. Others have said that the powers he revealed in the "house divided" speech, the debates with Douglas, and the Cooper Union address brought him to the Presidency. Still others have regarded his nomination and election as largely accidental. Mr. Baringer takes a more realistic view. It was the hard, practical work of Lincoln the politician and of a corps of fellow-politicians—David Davis, John M. Palmer, Gustav Koerner, and others—which first made him known to Republican leaders the country over; then gave him the victory over Seward at the Chicago Convention; and finally defeated Douglas and Breckinridge for the Presidency. Every maneuver, trick, and wile known to politics, as well as a display of masterly wisdom and firmness on the issues of the day, went into making Lincoln President.

This volume, centering upon the two and a half years between Lincoln's nomination for the Senate and his election as President, is a capable and useful summary of a mass of evidence previously in print. Nothing absolutely new is turned

up. But never before has the subject been treated in such detail; never before have all the data available in monographs, biographies, memoirs, letters, newspapers, etc., been brought together and analyzed. Beveridge would have done it had he lived, but his pen virtually stopped with 1858. Mr. Baringer's book therefore closes a real gap. What it does is to tell the interesting and illuminating story of the unsleeping effort, the adroit strategy, that brought Lincoln to the helm. He was at first reluctant; everyone recalls his statement to Henry Villard, "Just think of such a sucker as me as President!" If he encouraged talk of himself as Presidential timber, it was because it forwarded his Senatorial ambitions. But as stray editors and politicians took him up, he caught fire. The year 1859 found him giving unwonted parties in Springfield; buying control of a German newspaper there; preparing the Lincoln-Douglas debates for publication; speaking half a dozen times in Illinois cities; and making other speeches in Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Kansas. Before 1859 ended he had written his autobiography for campaign purposes and was rejoicing that Chicago had been made the convention city. His hat was in the center of the ring.

More than half of Mr. Baringer's book goes to the Chicago Convention and its preliminaries. Lincoln's friends faced doughty enemies; Seward's manager, Thurlow Weed, and Bates's managers, the Blairs, could make mincemeat of amateur politicians. But Norman Judd and David Davis proved more than a match for all

opponents. Even Jim Farley could learn something from this presentation of their methods. The way in which Judd organized the Illinois Republicans; then as national committeeman carried the convention to Chicago; then planned the stop-Seward strategy; then brought crowds of Lincolnites to Chicago by excursion rates; then seated the delegations so that New York was placed on the outskirts, while Pennsylvania and New Jersey were put between Illinois and Indiana to be converted; and finally packed the galleries on the crucial day with Lincoln shouters holding counterfeit tickets—all this was masterly. It is true that Lincoln had strokes of luck. But in the last analysis the Railsplitter was nominated by the efforts of himself and three or four of the shrewdest politicians Illinois has ever produced.

Mr. Baringer's full, accurate, and well-documented book has just one grievous fault: it is written in the most baroque type of journalese. Having studied Lincoln's rise so effectively, he should have given a little additional attention to Lincoln's style.

A Man to Know

JOHN. Irene Baird. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1937. \$2.

Reviewed by CURRIE CABOT

FOR this novel, flawless in its way, one would like to find the right words of praise. Restraint is the key-note of its excellence. Less delicately balanced, the story could have become sentimental. It is a book where all things are contrived to an end, the revelation of character, and all the details, chosen with a fine precision, contribute to a total effect: the full-length portrait of John. It is difficult, in a few words, to tell what John stands for—the book is written to explain just that. He is at once a creature of flesh and blood, and a way of life, a philosophy. One might say that he is an embodiment of the ideas of Lao-Tze, of whom, no doubt, he never heard, but whose principles he most perfectly exemplifies, living in frugality and contentment and an awareness of unity with nature and something beyond nature. "Avoid putting yourself before others, and you can become a leader among men,"—the words of Lao-Tze apply inevitably to John.

To read the book is to gain a remarkable knowledge of a man. John is simply there, real as someone known, living his life quietly in a queer, low, rambling house on a bluff looking over the sea, somewhere in British Columbia, content with garden and countryside, content to work with his hands. And what happens to him, slight as it is, is significant, for he has meaning and reality.

There is a lovely quietness about the book, a sparseness, a simplicity, a beauty in its writing that make it a joy to read.

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