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1923-12-18

Letter: William E. Barton to Ida M. Tarbell, December 18, 1923

Barton, William E.

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The First Congregational Church

REV. WILLIAM E. BARTON, D. D., LL. D., PASTOR
MRS. GRACE E. MAYER-OAKES, DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
MISS ZILPHA LLOYD, PASTOR'S SECRETARY
OAK PARK, ILLINOIS

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH HOUSE
LAKE STREET AND KENILWORTH AVENUE
TELEPHONE OAK PARK 27

December 18, 1923.

Dear Miss Tarbell:-

A few days ago I dropped you a line telling you that Mr. Warren had discovered a little item of interest in a legal complaint against Lucy Sparrow. I now rather wish I had not mentioned it, and I think I shall not print it, though of this I cannot be quite certain. I rather think it will be enough for me to say that there is documentary evidence that Lucy continued to lead a wayward life after she reached Kentucky and after her marriage to Henry Sparrow no breath of suspicion is known to exist against her chastity. I have made further investigation since Mr. Warren was here and am now in possession of the facts in the matter.

I had a very hysterical letter from Mrs. Hitchcock a few days ago. It seems she had just read my "Paternity of Abraham Lincoln" and is doubly horrified; first, that I treated the stories against the chastity of Lincoln's mother as worthy of any attention. Secondly, that I did not accept implicitly her little book. I am sorry she is disturbed, but I do not see how I can help it. The only part of my "Paternity of Lincoln" that will have to be re-written is the part in which I was still vainly hoping that she might be correct.

Her work was well intended but culpably superficial and someone through whom information came to her was very much worse than careless.

I shall be glad to see your new book. I have no desire to tell you anything that you ought to say in it, but I think it might be wise to say that while you believe implicitly that Abraham Lincoln's mother, Nancy Hanks, was the daughter of Joseph Hanks and his wife, Nancy, an increasing body of evidence believed by those in possession of it to be conclusive, makes it somewhat more than possible that Nancy was not the daughter, but the granddaughter of Joseph.

With all good wishes for the holiday season, I am,

Cordially yours,

William E. Barton

Miss Ida M. Tarbell,
120 East 19th St.,
New York City.