March 3, 1938

Dear Dr. Peterson:

Thank you for the trouble you took in writing me so kindly of my review of the Herndon Letters in The Times. I did not touch on Herndon's story that Lincoln had syphilis because I never took him seriously on that point. I have always been skeptical of Herndon as a reporter. He was given to the free use of what he called "historical imagination." As far as I know no other acquaintance of Lincoln ever hinted at such a thing or corroborated Herndon.

It is of course true that Lincoln may have been, let us say, indiscreet and scared lest he had contracted the disease, but I could never make out that there were evidences of a diseased condition. I realise that I may at any time be charged with having covered up a distasteful fact. I should like to be prepared to answer it with more knowledge of what the disease does to men than I have. People are constantly cured, are they not, from even serious attacks? How does it affect the mind and temperament?

As far as melancholy is concerned Lincoln had enough reasons without going so far afield as Herndon seems to me to do in his explanations.

If I am ever called down in this matter may I ask you to help me out?

With renewed thanks for your letter and kind regards to Mrs. Peterson

Faithfully

Dr. Reuben Peterson
Duxbury, Mass.