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The Ida M. Tarbell Collection of Lincolniana

Correspondence, research materials, writings, etc. about Abraham Lincoln

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1926-11-18

# Letter: Nathaniel W. Stephenson to Ida M. Tarbell, November 18, 1926

Stephenson, Nathaniel Wright

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YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
NEW HAVEN CONNECTICUT

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THE SUPERVISION AND CONTROL OF A COMMITTEE  
OF THE COUNCIL OF YALE UNIVERSITY

*Please address reply to New York Office  
522 Fifth Avenue New York City*

November 18, 1926.

Dear Miss Tarbell:

I am delighted to know that you are back from Italy for more reasons than one. Chief among them is the hope that you have something very interesting as a result of this journey that will very soon appear in type. It was intimated when you went abroad that the journey was for a specific purpose that would eventuate in literature. One thinks of Mussolini, the problems of Italian diplomacy, and all such things, and becomes impatient to see what will appear.

I am so glad that you approve the general idea of this type of book which I have labelled "Autobiography". When first proposed to me by the publishers I was very dubious whether it would be worth while. The whole thing was completed upon the strict model of Johnson's *CORSICAN*, with the result that I was entirely dissatisfied. Then it occurred to me to do it over again upon what I will confess to you in strict confidence was a frankly motion picture scheme, using connecting titles with the same function that the "subtitles" have in a picture. I am most interested and curious to see whether you think that the result as here worked out comes to a unit. I must confess that in the course of this second stage of the work I became entirely converted to the idea, and feel that it is really something of an accidental discovery. I suppose my historical colleagues would be shocked if I admitted that to be the source of this "technique", so to speak, but surely the humane point of view will be able to take it at least with amusement.

I am fully prepared to hear that there are omissions that you deplore. I can say the same on my own behalf. You know how such things happen- the ultimatum of the publisher that the manuscript must be shrunk so many per cent. There were passages which I put in, took out, put back, and took out again I don't know how often. It seemed to me that it was incumbent not only to find his career in his own words as far as I could but also to record the stages of his mental growth.

Yours very sincerely,

*Mathew W. Stephens*