April 7, 1921

Miss Frances M. Morehouse,
The University,
Manchester, England.

My dear Miss Morehouse:

I deeply regret that a reply to your letter of February 25 should have been so long delayed.

I was in the West on a lecture trip when it reached New York, and I came back to go to bed with a case of sinusitis which has until now made any regular work impossible. Please believe that it was no lack of interest in your letter that has made my answer so late.

And now about your question, and that is, to what the recent Lincoln cult is due. Of course, I take it that you mean in this country. As I see it, this Lincoln cult is not hero-worship. There has been a group in the country, survivors of the Civil War, to whom, unquestionably, Lincoln has been a hero. I believetheir worship is being replaced by a growing feeling of admiration and respect for the man,very solidly based. Our people are much devoted to what they consider the American type with its characteristics of common sense, directness, humor, and a bull-dog grip - and Lincoln had all of these things. Then his handling of the slavery question and his devotion to the Union have increased popular esteem for him steadily. More affection than idealism goes along with this popular sentiment. There has never been so large a halo around Lincoln as around Washington, and I doubt if there ever will be, because of the detailed study that the country gives to the man.

That there is perhaps greater interest in him today than there ever has been is undoubtedly true. This is partly to be explained by the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of his birth, in 1909. The period of the anniversary brought out a large amount of new material - important work such as Wells' diary, Carl Shurz' reminiscences, and a tremendous grist of fragments, some of them very important and entirely new. The discussion over these documents has by no means ceased yet. Then there is a new cycle. To each new generation, of course, the leading figures of a country must be presented; and they must be presented in a fresh view, to fit the temper and outlook of the day. And over here we are getting that just now.

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There is no doubt that the problems the War has thrust upon us have turned all the thoughtful of the country back to Lincoln. Through the War, and since, one of the commonest questions has been, What would Lincoln have done? His idea of what democracy means, of the necessity of going through even a civil war to protect a great experiment in popular government, his arguments and his decisions - all these have been a subject of new study through this period. I have wondered if it might not be that in England students of popular government had a feeling that perhaps they could learn something from him, and that in a way accounted for the unusual interest that England has seemed to me to have in the last few years in Lincoln.

You suggest that the Lincoln cult may in some way be due to Republican oratory. Less now than ever. As a matter of fact, the Republican oratory in the last few years has, been very far away from Lincoln's ideas and Lincoln's spirit. They have denied him at every point. What they have been attempting recently, however, is to make a hero of Roosevelt. All of their recent oratory has been turned to that point. Roosevelt had more of the qualities that make a popular hero than Lincoln ever had, but he did not have the intellectual and moral soundness that Lincoln had and on which, in my judgment, the enormous respect and admiration that we have for Lincoln is based. 192

You ask how much the "desire" to magnify the worth of diamond-in-the-rough public service" has to do with his place in the country. Not a little, particularly in the great West where so large a part of the population is "diamond in the rough." The popular orator emphasises this.

Again, you ask if there is not danger that "popular adulation and an aura of mythical supermanliness will jeopardize the sober evaluation of Lincoln's true and inestimable worth." Not to any great extent. The people, on the whole, have him about right. His place with us depends upon the conviction of the people that he was a man, and not that he was a superman. It is likeness to themselves, the fact that they understand the words he uses and the arguments - they understand, too, the struggle that he went through, it is so like their own. This is what binds the mass of the people to Lincoln, not oratory - particularly political oratory. Of course we get more or less of that, but it cuts no great amount of ice in building up esteem for Lincoln. It is his record and the fact that every American boy studies it that is the basis of his present position in the country.

I hope this letter will be of some use to you. I am dictating it hastily, partly because I have been so slow in my reply and partly because I really at the moment have not much leisure.

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(Miss F. M. M. 3)

If you publish your paper, will you not send me a copy of it?

Thanking you for writing me, believe me

Very sincerely yours,

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