

September 19, 1923

Mr. E. F. Saxton
244 Madison Avenue
New York City.

Dear Mr. Saxton:

I am sorry I am behind with the Barton manuscript - it could not be helped.

You ask me to write frankly, and I will do so. Of course I know Mr. Barton's "Soul of Abraham Lincoln" and "Paternity of Lincoln:" they are useful compilations of all, or practically all of the findings on their particular subjects, re-enforced by considerable new material, and as a Lincoln student I find them valuable.

I had hoped that in his present work he would use an entirely different method, digest thoroughly his mass of material and give a fresh and vivid narrative, suitable for the reading public. I don't think he has done that. The book seems to have the character of the earlier volumes. His chief additions to our previous knowledge concern the Kentucky life of the Lincoln family. He has cleared up there a considerable number of puzzling things and corrected our ignorance on more than one minor point.

I do not think myself that his chapter on Lincoln's mother and grandmother are satisfactory. He believes of course that he is right, but I don't see that he proves he is right, which is the point as things stand now in regard to Nancy Hanks. However, all that he puts down is valuable to the Lincoln student.

His treatment of the Hanks genealogy is a good example of what I mean when I say that I don't think he has written a clear narrative. I doubt that any general reader would understand what these chapters on the Sparrows, the Hanks, the Friends and the Halls are about. Lincoln students of course do, but it is too confused for what I mean when I talk about a Life of Lincoln.

To our knowledge of Lincoln in Illinois, he seems to have added a number of minor facts. I think there is nothing new in his treatment of the presidency.

He has not beaten his old matter into a fresh narrative.

Look over his pages and you will see how largely they are made up of full quotations from other narratives.

From the point of view of a "Life" also, there is a lack of proportion in his treatment. Take the mass of stuff that he has gotten together on the Gattysburg speech, all of which thoroughly interests me, but I should much prefer to have this in a pamphlet and not injected into such a story as I supposed Mr. Barton was aiming at.

What this amounts to is that, from my point of view, you have in Mr. Barton's manuscript a compilation of material on Lincoln's life, selected by a man who has been indefatigable in his researches, and who has covered the earlier period of the Lincoln story with more care than anybody else. In doing this he has brought out a good many new points, but his material has not been digested - this is a formless product.

This book would appeal to the same audience that the former volumes did. I should want it, and I think all Lincoln students and collectors would want it; but as a Life of Lincoln for the general public, I cannot see it.

This letter is for you alone, my dear Mr. Saxton. I value Mr. Barton's work highly. I have reason to believe that he is a little sensitive about criticism of his judgments and that he is a little personal where people differ from his conclusions on any point. I would not for the world hurt or offend him.

Very sincerely yours,