

November 13, 1959.

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

Dear Miss Tarbell -

By way of introduction, in hopes you will read this letter, I may say I know your friend, George Madden Martin, of Louisville, very well indeed (my first attempt at a book was dedicated to her), and I have heard her speak of you and Miss Viola Roseboro a hundred times at least, and always with admiration and affection.

I have just finished reading your autobiography, which I enjoyed enormously, and have ventured to write to you because of a statement you make in the book more than once, that you are interested in anything that has any connection with Lincoln.

I wanted to tell you a Lincoln anecdote, one I have never seen in any book on the man I ever read. My father, though he was a rabid and unreconstructed Southerner, was a great admirer of Lincoln. He used to say that Lincoln was one of the few really great men America had ever produced, that he was all the greater because he himself never really considered himself so. I don't know whether you would agree with that or not. My father also used to say that if Lincoln had lived the misery visited on the South by Reconstruction would never have been, because Lincoln was not vindictive like the majority of those left to handle the situation after his death, that he wanted the South to recover after the War, not to be brought lower than it had been already by four years of being fought over and the blow to its economic structure caused by the mass freeing of the slaves. He was firmly of the opinion that it was Reconstruction that had caused the hatred of the North in the South, and that held it back for more than a generation from progress when everything was there to make for progress. But I seem to be getting away from my Lincoln anecdote.

My father was also a good friend of Joshua Speed, who was, as you know, Lincoln's good friend, and he used to tell this story, as Mr. Speed told it to him.

It seems that at the time Lincoln's son died in the White House a vacancy occurred through death in a postmaster-ship in a small Michigan town. An enterprising citizen of the town, wishing to secure the place, decided the best way to apply for it would be in person, so got on the train and came to Washington to see Lincoln, even before they had held the funeral of the dead postmaster.

At the White House he was told by the servant who came

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came to the door that it would be impossible for him to talk with Mr. Lincoln. He insisted on having his name sent in, even though he admitted he had no appointment, and Lincoln, hearing the dispute going on came out of his study to see what the matter was. At once the man rushed toward him and demanded a conference.

As my father used to tell the story, quoting Mr. Speed, the President said, "Well, Josh, there he was and there I was and I couldn't very well not have him in."

Seated in Lincoln's study and asked what he wanted, the man told about the vacant office back home and that he wanted to be appointed to it, gave his qualifications, one of which, was I believe that he had voted for Lincoln and had from the beginning upheld his administration in every act.

Mr. Speed quoted Lincoln as saying, "I got angry when I found out an office was all he wanted, and that he pushed himself into see me on such a matter at such a time, and said to him, I want to ask you one question ... when you came to the door here, didn't you see crepe on it? Didn't you realize that meant somebody must be lying dead in this house?"

The man answered, "Yes, Mr. Lincoln, I did. But what I wanted to see you about was important."

Lincoln said, "Josh, I couldn't help it ... I burst right out, that crepe is hanging there for my son, his dead body at this moment is lying unburied in this house, and you come here, push yourself in with such a request! Couldn't you at least have had the decency to wait until after we had buried him? I'm asking you to go away and not come back here until after that? Do you know what he answered me? He answered me with a question, 'Mr. Lincoln, when do you think you'll bury him?' And you know, Josh, in spite of my feelings at the moment, I had to laugh!"

Incidentally, I believe Mr. Speed ended the story by saying that the man got the ~~particular~~ place he wanted.

My father always enjoyed this story, one that Mr. Lincoln had told Mr. Speed on himself, as illustrative of the man's humanity and bigness. I hope I have told you a bit about Lincoln you have never heard before, and that you will enjoy it as much as my father used to. I have told it badly, for which I am sorry, and I must ask you to forgive my typewriting.

Sincerely yours,

(Miss) Frances B Fox