

Greencastle Ind.,
Nov. 8, 1899.

My dear Miss Tarbell:

Yours of the 6th received. I have always been opposed to the publication of the details of Mr. Lincoln's ancestry. I never could see any good to result from it and I am ^{Mr. Linsler} sure, felt that way himself. Mr. Herndon who had investigated the subject almost forty years before Mrs. Hitchcock's researches began and who obviously knew a good deal about it said more than I would and more than I wanted him to tell. Whether Nancy Hanks was illegitimate or not cannot, in the least degree, affect the greatness of Abraham Lincoln. Her place in history is fixed beyond our power to add to or detract and his fame is imperishable. I do not therefore agree with you that "now is an excellent time to settle the question." In the first edition of Herndon's Lincoln Mr. Herndon was given free rein to say what he knew about Lincoln's mother; but in the next or Appleton edition which was published after his death and which underwent some amendment at my hands you will find that the unpleasant reference to Lincoln's mother, Nancy Hanks, has been elimin-

ated. That represents my notion as to the propriety of continuing the controversy. In my opinion no good can come of it and therefore the sooner it ceases the better.

My letter to you was not an endeavor to remind you of any certain line of proof but simply a friendly admonition to you to avoid committing yourself to the work of Mrs Hitchcock and thus keep out of the controversy. Mrs Hitchcock's researches are not at all conclusive. It is unnecessary for you to cite authorities in support of your statement as to the legitimacy of children recognized in a will. Not only no lawyer but no one else doubts the right of a man to legitimize his children though born out of wedlock. That is one of the oldest doctrines laid down in the law books and no one, therefore, questions the legitimacy of the Nancy Hanks mentioned in Joseph Hanks will. But who is going to prove that she is the same Nancy Hanks who wedded Thomas Lincoln and lies buried with her kindred on that lonely knoll in the midst of southern Indiana? Much as we would like to believe yet Mrs H. does not convince us. Whenever she establishes the identity of the two Nancy Hanks' she has made her case. Simply finding the two ~~additional~~ names in addition to that of the principal, poor old Tom Lincoln, on the

marriage bond as is required by the laws of Kentucky (and as
 was required of John Blaine thirty five years later) does not
 prove that the Nancy Hanks who stood up with Thomas Lincoln
 in the little cabin at Beechland was the identical Nancy Hanks
 who inherited the "heifer yearling called Peidy" from Joseph
 Hanks. It seems strange that at this late day Mrs H. should
 be able to reach such infallible conclusions as the result of
 a few brief and cursor trips from her Massachusetts home
 into Kentucky in the face of evidence, documentary and otherwise,
 gathered on the ground almost forty years before and that too
 emanating from persons who had seen "walked and talked"
 with the mother of Abraham Lincoln in the flesh. I have not
 undertaken in this letter to analyze or answer categorically all
 the contents of Mrs H^s book but I question the fidelity of a
 work which disassociates a man from his real mother
 and assigns to him a new maternity. I have often heard
 it said that a man is sometimes in doubt as to the identity of
 his father but he cannot be mistaken as to his mother. No one
 disputes the records, nor, on the other hand do the records
 controvert certain material facts the proof of which I have in
 mind. But I have said enough and more than I intended in the first
 place. I have given you my opinion. "Now" as Horace Greeley once wrote
 Lincoln "paddle your own dug-out!" Truly
 Yours W. W. Webb

P.S. If you will observe I said in my letter, not that I had the proof, but that I knew where it is and can have access to it if I want it. If I didn't say that I fully intended to. Just now I could not obtain the consent of my judgment to tell what I know, believe or can learn about the matter set forth in the foregoing letter but later I might be convinced ^{or coerced} into saying something. So far the provocation to do so has not arisen.

I could not but be amused at one item of evidence in Mrs. Hilehearts collection and that was the testimony of our old friend Dr. Christopher Columbus Graham. Of course the affidavit is thickened straw for it was published originally in the Indianapolis ^{several years ago} papers, the amusing feature is that a man almost a hundred years old should be able with such unerring fidelity to recall facts and details which others, who were born about the time he was, could not recall thirty five or forty years before. Of course the rosy mist between his senility and his youth has tented his memory and stimulated his recollection.

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The fourth joint debate held at Charleston Sep 18, 1858 was, in many respects, a very memorable one. Being so near the eastern limits of the state it was the first opportunity afforded the Indiana people to listen to a discussion of the issues involved. Great crowds arrived, many driving across the country in wagons and camping out over night at the outskirts of the town. It was during this debate that Lincoln created a sensation by leading forward Hon. O. B. Ficklin one of Douglas's adherents and supporters who sat on the platform and requiring him to serve as a witness in behalf of Lincoln and against his chief. It was a master stroke and redounded greatly to his advantage. Judge Douglas was accompanied by his beautiful and accomplished wife a fact which gave color to the charge emanating from his political ^{enemies} opponents that she was forced to attend him in order to prevent his too free indulgence in the use of liquor. Although no account of it is found in the only file of the local papers preserved yet several witnesses still living testify to the display of a rudely painted banner or canvas hung between two trees not far from the fair-grounds where the speeches were delivered representing a short, rotund figure standing before a bar with the regulation

assortment of decanters and glasses in the act of emptying down his throat a tumbler well filled with liquor. Beneath the artist had scrawled in lamp-black the significant title:

"Douglas's early practice before the bar."

The allusion being painfully personal and suggestive, and the adherents of the Little Giant having threatened its destruction it was taken down before the entire procession had passed within the fair-grounds.

Note furnished by J. W. Wink.