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February 9th, 1931.

My dear Miss Tarbell:

Will you let me add to the very great pleasure I have just had in reading your story in this week's Collier's that of sharing with you the high pleasure you must have in its extreme timeliness? It comes in the nick of time to serve as antitoxin in veins into which Edger Lee Masters is injecting his virus. At least the phrases of it which the wires have brought out here are utterly virulent. They led me to read again what he has about Lincoln in his Jack Kelso. Near the end he has Mc Namar say a nasty thing about Lincoln's failure to place a stone at poor Ann's grave. But what others are made to say of Lincoln in the earlier pages might have been said by your Billy Brown, although Billy would have kept still had he supposed that Lincoln's friendliness to the fugitive slave boy was due to an impulse which quickly "passed the flush," leaving the impulsive under-ground railroad man glad to let Jack give the lad his next meal.

There is, at worst, nothing to prepare a reader of that "dramatic poem" for the rabid attack in this prose work. Which makes it difficult to avoid the suspicion that Masters has taken the easiest way to get his new book in among the best sellers. For the garish sun of the day of muckraking is not yet set.

What Billy tells about the great debates of 1858 recalled to me what I was told of an incident of one of them which may interest you. It was told to Lord Charnwood when on a visit to this coast; he took it down, but so far as I know has made no use of it in print, although he said he would do so.

It was from the lips from which I heard it more than once. Those of my lately deceased friend W. T. Reid, LL. D., once President of our State University. At the time that he listened to one of the debates he was a farmer boy of about fifteen.

I do not recall which one of the debates it was, but it must have been one of the earlier, for the weather was extremely warm, the heat extending to the time when, Douglas having finished his speech, Lincoln arose to reply.

As he came forward he took off his coat and, holding it toward others on the platform said:

"Will some one hold my ^{garment} clothes while I stone Stephen?"

The biblical allusion was at once caught by the audience, who broke into roars ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ of laughter and doubtless did much of what it was intended to do, put his hearers in that best of the humors we are content to call "good."

I have shared with you, though in far less measure, the privilege of which you speak in the note introductory to your inspiring and informing tale. Of one of those who knew Lincoln in his "prairie years" whom I have known Mr. Ross, who carried the ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ mail on the rural route on which New Salem was a station and who had thus many occasions to chat with the postmaster, I wrote you several years ago, giving the name and address of his son, from whom I thought you might get something of interest in what he had heard his father tell of those meetings.

One sad privilege I had which you could not have had, if I do not misjudge your age. On a rainy Sunday in April, 1865, I was one of a long line of Sunday School children--I was then seven-- who filed through the old State House in Indianapolis, where the body of Lincoln lay in state for part of the day. I was so awed by the sombre drappings of the rotunda that I should have passed by the casket without having the brief look at the martyr's face which is the most cherished of my earlier days had not one of the soldiers serving as a guard of honor arrested my wandering eyes.

Some thirty years later I formed an intimate friendship with one of the four soldiers, ~~XXXXXX~~ a fellow townsman in southern California, and indulge fancy her whimsey that it was to him that I owe the friendly service as well as many others for which he died leaving me gratefully obligated.

Pardon an old man for prating on so and believe me under very real obligations to you, both for that story and for that of the two volumes in which the whole of the wonderful tale is told.

Very sincerely yours,

