Allentown, Pa.
Sep 23-1935.

Miss Ida M. Tarbell,
130 East 19th St.
N.Y. City

Dear Miss Tarbell—:

It affords me pleasure to address you informally as I have always cherished the highest regards for the biographer of Abraham Lincoln. To write to an authority on the life of such a man as the immortal Lincoln is in itself a high compliment. There is no bond quite so strong than the tie that binds us together in our love and admiration for the man whose spirit hovers over us like a benediction. During these trying times we are not unmindful of his inspired leadership during the dark days of the Civil War. It seems almost miraculous how men and nations acclaim Lincoln's greatness from the standpoint of true worth and lofty sublimity, yet in spite of it all, he remains an enigma, inscrutable and relentless as Time. To study such

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an outstanding personality affords us both knowledge and inspiration, for we feel at home with the man and his love for the common people. When we study Lincoln, with all his lovable quaint, and homely characteristics, that which fascinates us most is his matchless sublimity — a born leader of men and always in time with the Infinite. If by some art of magic, the spirit of Lincoln might manifest itself in the hearts of the people, what a change would take place in all the emporiums of life.

Ever since I came to divine on his career, I have loved him to distraction.

As your unknown friend, I take pleasure of enclosing an article for your perusal. If it possesses any historical merit, want you please tell me. Fact and fancy are interwoven in the romantic episode, and maybe, the effort seems strained, but I have faith in your ability to sift the evidence, so veiled in mystery.

With kindest regards, I remain —

Yours Sincerely

Harry A. Knerr,
444 N. Fulton St.

P.S. The copy is yours to keep, complimentary

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H.O. KNERR, ALLENTOWN. PA.

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN and MATILDA EDWARDS

There lies buried in a cemetery, adjacent to the city of Reading, Pennsylvania; a certain Mrs. Newton D. Strong, who as a young woman, exerted a powerful influence in the romance of Abraham Lincoln. As a potential rival of Mary Todd, the name of Matilda Edwards registers an interesting chapter of local history.

When romance can be added to facts in telling the life story of a man, such a narrative becomes interesting and significant. When history and tradition enshrine the region or locality in which we live, romance becomes idyllic and arouses our interest and curiosity.

Let us unfetter fancy and wander over the old trails with one whose humanity and love are the blessed heritage of a united country. In so doing, let us select the nearest approach to chronology regardless of its ramifications.

History and romance are a part of human progress and achievement. As twin-sisters, they record some of the most thrilling episodes in the affairs of men. The decade of 1840 to 1850 is replete with personal accounts of social and political rivalry in the border states of the West. It was in the Spring of 1840 that the fever of migration was regnant and unrestrained. Incidentally, many of the so-called squatters hailed from the Atlantic seaboard and from the cotton belt of the South. It is a singular fact that the migratory element represented a diversity of traits, customs, and practices at a time vibrant with destiny.

By a strange combination of circumstances, there are available some fascinating episodes of pioneer days when the agitation of the slavery question aroused discussion.

The scenery shifts and we see the guests in the home of that influential citizen of Springfield, Illinois--the Hon. Ninian W. Edwards, who as a member of the "Long Nine", was held in high esteem by many of his associates--including a future President. Cyrus Edwards, an uncle of Ninian, served in the State Senate at the time the capital was transferred from Vandalia to Springfield.

The prestige of the Edwards family, both socially and politically, had a tendency to attract many of the elite of that time. Thither came Matilda Edwards, daughter of Cyrus Edwards of Alton, to pay an extended visit to her cousin Ninian, whose wife, Elizabeth was a sister to Mary Todd of Lexington, Kentucky. Another sister, Frances Todd, was already engaged to Dr. William A. Wallace of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Dr. Wallace, who had graduated from Jefferson Medical College in 1836, went to

Springfield and became a leading physician. It was largely due to Dr. Wallace's influence that Mary Todd refused to receive further courtesies from Stephen A. Douglas, who like the gallant, Joshua F. Speed, had at one time proposed to Matilda Edwards and were both rejected as unworthy to espouse the matrimonial vow.

It was at a cotillion party, sponsored by Mrs. Edwards, that Matilda met the tall, gaunt, and modest young barrister, Abraham Lincoln. We can imagine how timid and awkward the "pioneer" lawyer must have appeared as he bowed to the handsome and queenly Matilda.

A careful scrutiny of the guests assembled there will reveal some outstanding characteristics. The girls in the new capital were almost all Kentucky belles. The prevailing type being brunettes. Matilda was a blonde, tall, willowy and graceful--a great favorite of Lincoln and Douglas.

As a potential rival of Mary Todd, we may assume that Matilda Edwards had her affections centered on Abraham Lincoln in a rather unpretentous way. She and Mary Todd happened to sleep in the same bed, and, strange to say, both confided to each other those secrets of the human heart without manifesting any feelings of jealousy or resentment, however secretly nurtured. The modesty and composure of Matilda in the midst of the episode did not appeal to the impulsive nature of Mary Todd. The fact that Lincoln loved Matilda Edwards was known to Mary and she was not in a mood to accept his vagaries without impunity. Mary flirted with Douglas and aroused the antipathy of Lincoln, but why should he care while he admired and loved Matilda Edwards.

To verify the foregoing, let us refer to the testimony of those whose versions of the affair are trustworthy and reliable. Such noted authorities as Herndon, Speed, and Browning have handed down to posterity fair and impartial evidence--citing the fatal first of January 1841, when arrangements had been made to solemnize the wedding of Mary Todd to Abraham Lincoln, but that the groom failed to appear.

It seems that the crudities and refinements, so baffling to Lincoln's philosophy of life, were then in open conflict, and that he hesitated at the brink of matrimony with fear and trembling. Torn between love and morbid misgivings, he sought counsel and advice from Speed and was told to postpone the wedding. We can ascribe no reason for Lincoln's acts and actions save his infatuation with Matilda Edwards. It was Lamon, who stated that Matilda Edwards was unquestionably the idol of Lincoln's wavering affections. She had visited Springfield at a most opportune time and proved a powerful factor in Lincoln's matrimonial tangle.

Biographers of Lincoln have treated this episode in his life rather briefly, but the perspective of time has accredited the

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seemingly fantastic phase of the romance to a fair, young lady from Alton, who was destined to become the wife of the Hon. Newton D. Strong, of Reading, Pennsylvania.

According to the records in our local archives, Newton D. Strong, after graduating with honors at Yale College, was appointed a tutor in his Alma Mater, a position he held for two years. At the request of his brother, William, he returned to Reading and assumed the study of law--being admitted to the bar of Berks County in 1835. After practicing his profession for a few years at Easton, Pennsylvania, he moved to Alton, Illinois, where he soon took a leading position among the lawyers of that state. It must have been but a short time after his arrival at Alton that he married Matilda Edwards.

The following letter from a niece of Matilda Edwards will substantiate the facts surrounding the episode in Lincoln's life.

Alton, Illinois, March 22, 1935

Dear Sir:-

Your letter to the Hayner Memorial Library has been given to me to answer as I am a granddaughter of Cyrus Edwards and a niece of Matilda Edwards Strong. Cyrus Edwards, son of Benjamin Edwards was born in Montgomery County, Maryland, on his father's plantation--Mt. Pleasant. His boyhood and early manhood were spent there. William Wirt was a tutor in his family. Following the tide of immigration, the family moved to Kentucky, where they remained but a few years. The year 1817 Cyrus Edwards followed his brother, Ninian, to Illinois where in 1809 he had been elected territorial governor. Cyrus Edwards was a man of commanding presence, six feet four inches tall, always elegantly dressed, a lawyer and a politician. His oldest daughter, Matilda, was born at Elkton, Kentucky, August 1, 1822. She was a most fascinating and handsome girl, tall, graceful, and rather reserved. She moved at ease among the social and refined classes at Alton.

Abraham Lincoln was a frequent visitor at her father's house. It was on a visit to her cousin, Ninian, that she formed a warm friendship with Lincoln. Tradition tells us that Lincoln and Douglas were both in love with her.

Matilda Edwards married Newton D. Strong at "Woodlawn", the country home of her father near Alton. Her married life was of short duration and she had no children to bless and perpetuate her name. Somewhere among the records of the old court house at Reading, Pennsylvania, you will find more of the life of Newton D. Strong and of his devoted wife, Matilda, who as a young lady, exerted a powerful influence in the life of the immortal Abraham Lincoln.

Pray believe me--

Truly yours,
Alice Edwards Quigley

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