July 31, 1923

Mr. Henry B. Rankin,
Springfield, Ill.

Dear Mr. Rankin:

My Secretary wrote you last week that I was out of town when your letter and manuscript came and that I would write you at once on receiving the manuscript and reading it.

I did read it since I came back to my desk, and of course with sustained interest. Anything that comes from one who actually knew Lincoln, and particularly knew him in such a relation as you did, is precious.

I do not feel competent to criticise or change. It is what is in your mind, your reflections, your impressions that are important. Now, I could not presume to do a critical reading, nor do I think that that is what is wanted. What is of importance is the way he seems to you after eighty-six years of a life like yours, so I am not going to attempt to suggest anything, unless it would be to re-arrange your chapters to make them more nearly chronological. That is, it seems to me that Chapter IV should certainly go before Chapter III. I am a little doubtful about including the article and letter of Brownlow, as I am the references to Grant. They interrupt your story. The thread of the narrative in a series of chapters such as yours is so slight that it only can be kept - and it is useful that it should be kept - by arranging the chapters chronologically and keeping out extraneous matter. That is the way this seems to me.

I am particularly interested in the letter that you insert between pages 90 and 91, your unknown, to me, friend's reminiscences of what Herndon told him. If your correspondent is right in his recollections of what Herndon told him, then Mr. Herndon is wrong in his published account of this episode, that is, Mr. Lincoln did not definitely state to him that his mother was the illegitimate child of Lucy Hanks. This story that is here told seems to me the much more probable, and Herndon made definite what on Lincoln's tongue was indefinite, applying his historical imagination much as he applied it to the story of the wedding from which he says Mr. Lincoln ran away.

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If it is no breach of confidence, I would like very much to know who your correspondent is.

And now as to my writing a foreword for you. Of course I will do it, dear Mr. Rankin, if you want me to. How soon must you have the copy? I know it would be better short, of course, as you say. I will send the manuscript in a couple of days. I found the dollar you enclosed and will use all that is necessary.

Sincerely yours,

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