643 West Fourth Street.

Cincinnati, July 2nd, 1900.

My dear Miss Tarbell,

It is a very conclusive evidence to my mind of the thoroughness of your researches about Abraham Lincoln that you have fallen upon the fact of the existence of my long lost friend Victor Smith. He was a queer man, cranky as possible, imprudently partisan and zealous, always ready for controversy. He was a wonderfully accurate and rapid phonographer, one of the first in the West of whom that could be said. His life in Chicago was a romance, ending by his marriage with a beautiful girl who was the daughter of one of the first citizens, in point of time and fortune. They had not been married long before it was another case of Annabel Lee. You remember Poe's poem, how a wind blew out of a cloud chilling and killing Annabel Lee.

It was after this experience, and Smith had come to Cincinnati, that I became acquainted with him. This was in 1852, and he and I were together on the Cincinnati Commercial in 1853. He was one of the fiercest of the devoted admirers of Chase, and felt that the country had done a great wrong, indeed had committed an unpardonable sin, in not preferring Chase for the Presidency to Abraham Lincoln. He never got over it. There were stories about his misconduct in office. I have thought perhaps that the foundation was a habit he had of speaking in terms of disrespect and disparagement of Lincoln. He took the view that many had at the beginning of Lincoln's administration, that Lincoln was an unwise and uncouth person, and that almost anybody else would have been better in his place.

I do not know but you have seen the story that I have told of calling the attention of a man in the White House yard to the fact that Lincoln was shedding tears. The man whose attention I invited to this I have not mentioned anywhere. It was Mr. Victor Smith, who thought that Lincoln was behaving himself ridiculously because he was making no demonstration as the troops passed him, because he did not stand up on a horse block, that the boys who were going down to Virginia could see him. These expressions were made very near Mr Lincoln and directly behind him, and I touched Smith with my elbow as he was criticising the President, who was standing with a big black silk hat with a weed on it and was watching the troops defile, the tears streaming down his cheeks. Smith hadn't noticed this evidence of emotion and was in an undertone, which seemed to me quite distinct, calling the President's attention to the fact that he didn't know how to behave himself under any circumstances, and he was very quickly silent and apparently struck with some

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novel idea when he noticed that the attitude of Mr. Lincoln was that of a struggle with himself to prevent his emotion becoming too manifest to those who were about him.

All this will tell you a good deal and give you the key to the character of Smith and there is something in it that tells of the man Lincoln also.

Smith was believe to have perished not in the West Indies, but on the Pacific Ocean in the wreck of the steamer Brother Jonathan--and here is something I don't want you to say anything about on my story, for I know nothing to confirm it. He was in charge at the time of a large sum of money and was on the way to Oregon I think. The particulars are not sharply outlined in my mind, because I knew nothing of the affairs except that his loss was announced and with him the money. There was a story long afterwards that I always regarded as a romance, that he was saved with the money and was somewhere on an island in the Pacific Ocean. I presume it was altogether a fancy of an enemy.

Mr. Smith married the second time the daughter of a famous New Hampshire abolitionist of early celebrity named Rogers, and Rogers wrote a book--or there was a collection made of his editorials. Two of his daughters came to Cincinnati, and one of them became Victor Smith's second wife. She was a bright, exceedingly intelligent young lady, very slender and pleasing, and was remarkable for her beautiful head of red hair. She is gone long ago, but there are children and chilren's children, I believe, and one of Mr. Smith's sons--I am not sure there was more than one--but one of them became greatly displeased with me because I could not do anything for him in the way of finding public employment for him out in California, and he was quite sharp and denunciatory because I had been a friend of his father--but I was not in relation with the powers such that I could apply for him, and I didn't know much about the young man and wasn't favorably impressed with his quarrel with me. I mention the existence of the children and grandchildren because you should deal with any facts that I give you in this connection with reserve and tenderness. Of course, I should be silent if I were not certain that this would be your thought.

Smith was appointed to a position in the Treasury Department by Chase that took him to the Pacific, and that seemed to be the end of him, and then this story that I have mentioned came up.

I would like to know just what it is that has drawn your attention to him. He was a man of brilliant intelligence and ferocious prejudices, hasty and impetuous, and yet with generous heart and kindly feeling.

Very truly, Murat Halstead

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