

EAST NORTHFIELD,  
MASS.

L.S. Religion

Feb 3-96

Ld. McClure Esq,

My dear Sir;

How about the matter  
of the enclosed clipping?  
Can't you have it properly  
looked up, and answered?  
Some things about it are  
obvious:

I whatever Herndon wrote for  
the Index he said nothing  
of this - am I not-right? -  
in his Life of Lincoln.

II The real contents of the  
ms are not known, &  
how far they antagonized  
Christianity remains to  
be shown.

III At most, <sup>it is</sup> a wholly  
immature period of Lincoln

religious views, which, by abundant & unanswerable testimony, rec'd a marked development in the direction of Evangelicality during his presidential career. His confidence in the divinity of Christ, in the authority, supremacy & sufficiency of the Bible, during his last years, and in a prayer hearing God as the only hope of the nation & of any man, was shown again & again in the most explicit way. Every <sup>newly</sup> public paper that he issued, or address that he made, was a confession of faith in God & Christianity.

# The Sun.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 1896.

## Lincoln Wrote a Free-thought Work.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SUN—Sir: In your paper of to-day I find the following:

What "free-thought work," or any kind of work, did Mr. Lincoln write in his early life, or at any other time in his life?

Presuming this to be an honest request for information, I submit the following answer: William H. Herndon, as you know, was the partner of Lincoln up to the day of the latter's death. He knew Lincoln intimately, and knew of many incidents in his career which others did not. Judge David Davis, in whose court both Lincoln and Herndon practised for years, declared that Herndon knew more about Lincoln's religion than any other man.

In 1870 Mr. Herndon contributed to the *Index*, published in Toledo, O., edited by Francis E. Abbott, an article on Lincoln's religious ideas. In this letter Mr. Herndon gives the following account of the "free-thought work" which Mr. Lincoln wrote:

In 1835 he (Lincoln) wrote out a small work on infidelity, and intended to have it published. The book was an attack upon the whole grounds of Christianity, and especially was it an attack upon the idea that Jesus was the Christ, the true and only begotten son of God, as the Christian world contends. Mr. Lincoln was at that time in New Salem, keeping store for Mr. Samuel Hill, a merchant and Postmaster of that place. Lincoln and Hill were very friendly. Hill, I think, was a skeptic at this time. Lincoln one day, after the book was finished, read it to Mr. Hill, his good friend. Hill tried to persuade him not to make it public, not to publish it. Hill at that time saw in Lincoln a rising man, and wished him success. Lincoln refused to destroy it; said it should be published. Hill swore it should never see light of day. He had an eye on Lincoln's popularity—his present and future success; and believing that if the book was published it would kill Lincoln forever, he snatched it from Lincoln's hand when Lincoln was not expecting it, and ran it into an old-fashioned tin plate stove, heated as hot as a furnace, and so Lincoln's book went up to the clouds in smoke.

I do not think it was very lofty conduct upon the part of Mr. Hill, and I wish Lincoln had rewritten the work and given it to the public. But that is neither here nor there. The fact that Lincoln wrote a free-thought work, which you seem to doubt, is settled by this testimony by Mr. Herndon. You will find it on pages 101-2 of "Abraham Lincoln: Was He a Christian?" by John E. Remsburg, published by the *Truth Seeker* Company of 28 Lafayette place, this city. Yours, very truly, E. M. MACDONALD.

NEW YORK, Jan. 29.

EAST NORTHFIELD,  
MASS.

Holland, Chittendon, Coffin,  
Arnold and other bio-  
graphers make it perfectly  
evident that in every  
essential respect Lincoln  
was a Christian both in  
life & doctrine. His creed  
was short, but it was  
Biblical. He was not  
prepared to commit him-  
self to ~~any~~ <sup>the</sup> any elab-  
orate Theology or church  
system of interpretation, &  
he ~~had~~ <sup>did</sup> not formally join  
~~any church~~ <sup>the</sup> membership of  
<sup>any church.</sup>  
But by word & deed he  
confessed his Christian faith  
in many ways & times  
while he was president.

IV. Herndon's intimacy with Lincoln ended with the first inauguration, though even full his previous acquaintance, much after that was beyond his knowledge.

V. - Herndon's testimony was somewhat biased by his own religious views. He held ~~these~~ the views of Theodore Parker, & knew that Lincoln was interested in Parker's writings, and states that Lincoln's opinions were the same. Lincoln was a far deeper man than Herndon, his religious thinking for many years seems to have been in a

- fluent and largely undetermined state; he was reticent about many things, & there is no evidence that he fully unburdened himself ~~regarding~~ in this matter to Herndon, or even, for obvious reasons, to his own wife. ~~to~~ Even her testimony as given by Herndon may well be subject to some discount.

VI All of Lincoln's later life shows that if he were at any time the author of any discussion hostile to Christianity, he must also have been the most thankful of all men that it never saw the light.

~~It~~ - It is foolish and  
 wicked to judge any man's  
 mature and paramount  
 convictions by the crude  
 and transitional opinions  
 of his youth; and this  
 will not be done by any  
~~person~~ but a special plead-  
 er for a private cause.

This letter, as you see, is written  
 hastily & not for publication.  
 I only wished to call attention  
 at the present stage of Miss J's  
 memoir, to the publication of the  
 Sun. I am sending you five  
 admirable portraits of Mrs Betsey  
 Moody, mother of the Evangelist.  
 She died on the 26<sup>th</sup> inst almost 91  
 yrs old. In a few days - three or four -  
 I hope to send you an acct of her  
 which possibly you may wish to  
 print. She was one of the great mothers  
 who make great sons. W D Truly -  
 Henry W. Canham.