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Wichita, Kansas, August 30th, 1911.

Dear Miss Tarbell,-

You may remember that some years ago I wrote you from Dodge City, regarding Mr. Lincoln. I had a very gracious letter in reply.

Last spring, after listening to the finest Messiah Chorus in America, at Lindsborg, I "jumped" to Wichita" in the hope of hearing your lecture on Abraham Lincoln, the evening of April 17th.

Imagine my disappointment when Mrs. Carter told me that the date had been canceled. I sincerely hope that you have long since recovered from the illness which was the cause of the cancellation.

Now I want to give you another Lincoln story, which I think has never been published. I got it from one of the participants in the incident, Dick Walker, now dead, at one time United States Marshall for Kansas.

I was sitting in a little hotel one Saturday evening at Independence, Kansas, when I found myself talking with a very interesting and well-informed but seedily dressed gentleman whom I found, after a few moments, was an old neighbor of mine, for he too had come from Jacksonville, and more than that, he like myself, had been a student at Illinois College and a member of the Sigma Pi Society.

There were two College Societies; the Sigma Pi, and the Phi Alpha. In the old days these societies took turns in providing the community with a winter lecture course. Many a man whose name is a household word in American letters, has been the guest of those

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societies. These lectures were usually given in the old Congregational Church that stood on the East side of the square. I do not remember it as a church. My earliest recollection of the building was during the Civil War when it was used as a drill room for the home guards. Later it was used, as I think it still is, as a furniture warehouse. But that little old building has memories of finely cultured audiences such as no other building in Illinois could boast at the time they assembled.

Jacksonville is the seat of the first institution of higher learning in the State and the community had a large sprinkling of people of the highest culture.

One evening, probably in the middle 50's, I am not sure of the exact year, Dick Walker and Bob Fitch, students at the college and brother "Sig's", were in the office of the old Mansion House on the North side of the square, now the Park Hotel, when a tall stranger entered. He inquired for the place of meeting. It was Mr. Lincoln Evidently something had gone wrong and Dick and Bob offered to conduct him to the church. He accepted their offer gratefully and they were about to pass out of the room when Mr. Lincoln noticed a man huddled up in a chair in a corner, and walking over, put his hand on the man's shoulder.

It was poor old Tom Smith in a state of semi-intoxication. He looked up and recognized his visitor. "How are you, Mr. Lincoln?" he said.

"How are you Tom?" said Mr. Lincoln. "Tom, I want you to come over and hear my lecture."

"Why no, Mr. Lincoln," said Tom, "I aint fit. They wont let me in anyhow."

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"Yes, they will," said Lincoln, "if you don't go in I don't go in, so come on, I will give you a good seat." And taking him by the arm he lifted him from his chair and together the quartette marched across the square to the church and up the aisle of as fine and cultured an audience as Illinois could boast.

Dr. J. P. Willard, now living at Denver, was present at that lecture in the capacity of a small boy. The title was "Glass". As to the subject matter, that has vanished from his memory, but he remembers clearly the alternating smiles and tears which attested the speaker's power over his audience.

Tom Smith was the first man that I ever saw under the influence of liquor. He was always "drunk and dressed up", with a stove pipe hat and a frock coat. He had done Mr. Lincoln a kindness and Lincoln never forgot a kindness. The man's weakness made no difference with his friendship.

The simple little story of unostentatious friendship appealed to me as I think it will to you, as showing the heart of the man.

I have known every actor in the little drama. Tom Smith is long since dead. Dick Walker is dead. Bob Fitch, afterwards Gov. Yates private secretary during the Civil War, now living at great age in Omaha. I saw him a few weeks ago.

Recently I was visiting an older brother in Missouri and in talking over the early days he told me of a couple of incidents concerning Mr. Lincoln, which may possibly interest you. These are rather in the nature of side lights on the family relation.

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There had been a hanging at Springfield and the children of the neighborhood had gathered up some puppies and kittens and were putting them through the dreadful performance in Mr. Lincoln's barn.

I don't know whether any of the little innocents really gave up their lives or not, but when Mr. Lincoln came home and learned what was going on, he lost no time. Running across the back yard, to the barn, he snatched a stave from the decrepit old ash hopper and burst upon the assembled barbarians, scattering blows right and left. My brother came in for his share and the present President of the Pullman Palace Car Company got a full quota. The kittens and puppies were rescued and the children departed for their various homes with more celerity than that with which they had assembled.

That evening Mrs. Lincoln invited them all to her house for a candy pulling. My brother says that it was to spite her husband. I suggested that it was intended as a balm to the hurt bodies and feelings, but he wouldn't have it.

The candy pulling was not a success. The molasses boiled over and the irate dame dumped molasses, pot and all, into a neighboring lot.

Another incident he told me, that my father told me many years before, only my father thought it occurred after Mr. Lincoln's election to the Presidency, while my brother insists it was after his election to Congress, years before. I don't know which is right.

In those days wrapping paper was very costly. I remember how we children used to save up the daily and weekly papers and carry them up to the butcher and we got a price that no trust on earth

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would dare to rival today. The butcher in Springfield conceived the brilliant idea of long pecan or hickory skewers for his meat. He had a good whittler in his shop and he whittled the small sticks to a fine point, leaving enough for a hand grasp, and his customers carried their meat home by the aid of this stick. It was clean and inexpensive.

The head of the households in those days, you know, went to market, and one morning Mr. Lincoln appeared at the kitchen door carrying a skewered beefsteak before him. As he went into the kitchen his wife snatched the beefsteak and with flashing eye declared, "That is a Damn pretty way for the President of the United States to come home."

Now, as I said, that may have been Congressman.

I am afraid, my dear Miss Tarbell, that these incidents are very crudely told, but I have ventured to relate them knowing that anything that has to do with the life of Abraham Lincoln is not without interest to you.

And there has been another reason. Like Maj. Bagstock of ancient fame, I am "sly". "Develish sly is Joey." I want a kind service in return for these Lincoln stories. I have written very little, have ~~never~~ published but one story in my life and that was nearly thirty years ago. I have offered others, but they have always come back with the kindly assurance that the inability of the publisher to use them is not to be construed as in any way suggesting a deficiency of merit. I have published some articles on social logic and historical subjects, but no more stories.

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I begin to see that there is such a thing as technique in story writing, and while technique will not make a story without there being a story to tell, yet in the telling of a story technique is just as necessary as in the performance of a surgical operation, or in making of a picture.

I am afraid this understanding has come to me rather late to be of much value, but I am trying again and I am enclosing three stories, "The Brother of the Poor," "Going - Going", and "Local Color, at Dodge", together with a couple of lyrics for your inspection, and I ~~should~~ shall be under great obligation to you if you will write me and tell me what virtues, if any, they possess, and their demerits, if not too numerous.

Very truly yours,

W. J. Reaves
318 N. Douglas Ave.,
Wichita Kans.

Picture incident - good
children - excellent

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