

Auburn, California.  
October 29th, '20.

Dear Miss Tarbell:

I redeived your lovely letter yesterday noon and "He Knew Lincoln" this evening. I don't know how to thank you for your kindness, your generous pains. You make a fellow's heart glad, and glad again, and thrilled with the possession of a gift book with your name and mine in it. And such a book!

I have just read it through. I read it in "McClure's"?--was it?--when it first came out. And I must have had a lump in my throat when I read it that time--or else I've grown softer in the passing years. There is such a curious vividness about it, the impact of it is so intimate and strong: it goes before the reader's eyes like his own life. The description of Lincoln's voice is terribly effective in its simple directness. The shrillness of it going right to the heart..."and that night it sounded sadder than anything I ever heard." And the old fellow hearing it on wild nights. So real--and so present to me right to-night. Through the vivid force, the quick and simple beauty of it.

Oh, what pathos in the fact that Lincoln enjoyed Billy's visit even when he thought Billy had come for some gift--the pathos of his incredulity when he found Billy had come just to see him! The night walk and talk--that lasted until the stars began to go out--there's a mighty beauty in that!....And then the old empty chair back home--and the unbelievable thought--"He'll never come back, Billy. He's dead!"

It must bring a warmth to your heart whenever you think again that you created a thing of such classic directness and beauty. It certainly warms me up to think that I own a copy of it presented to me by its own author.

I am so happy to hear what you say about yourself and Phillips and Baker and Boyden retaining the old friendship. One of the most dispiriting things is the way old towns change and old friendly circles break and lapse. And the most heartening thing to think of is the way that some friendly groups hang on to the old association and each other's prized and treasured regard. I wonder if Mr. Baker is perchance teaching in Amherst. My father was an Amherst man for two years--then Michigan University. It was awfully good for you to tell me about them and where they can be reached.

so

The influence of writers is ~~fearfully~~ impalpable that it seems sometimes as if a book were a shadow ship that passes in a night. Yet we can scarcely believe that England would be England to-day if Dickens for instance had never lived. And if we take Thackeray and Eliot and Stevenson away--could England have won the war! I rather doubt it.

The saddest thing about the writer's orientation to the cabbage is that he's on the off side of it. It takes country air and country delving in the husky, musty old earth to put the sharp edge on one's appreciation of such pomme de terre as cabbage. It's got to be wed and sprayed and cosseted before you feel the full bloom of it. So that you writers even in your wistful vision of the cabbage as something of sounder value are defrauded of the full zest of the matter. You see it as through azglass darkly. The very persons who are most competent to feel the thrill of cabbages must be closeted away in their writing cabinets. The paradoxical perversity of it!

I have just been having a delightful time of it on this mountain town's newspaper. Yesterday we got out the biggest sheet ever published in this town--a 16 page paper. We were tremendously proud of ourselves. On the way home at noon Cassidy, the boss, said to me: "Harold, that's the real pleasure of life--working like we did this morning, all feeling we had a hand in a big accomplishment, feeling that we were doing it together--and all of us as happy as the dickens!" I agreed, and we felt a thrill of chumminess and the keyed up delight of sharing our appreciation of that happiness consciously.

We took the old linotypist out home to his little ranch about seven o'clock in the evening; and as we drove back into town we saw a red--an orange moon getting up over the misty purple of fields on fields of mountains. And we were happier then than we were at noon, and only stopped our whistling and singing when we got into town. We came down to the shop after supper, with still a couple hours work before we could go to press, and so tired we were silly. Spite of that we sang and joked over the work. Presently we had her on the press--and then it was a joy to see the project materilizing swiftly before our eyes. Our 16 page paper! Mac, and Quinliven, Dosey and Cassidy and self--we looked it over and called it good. And tired as we were, at eleven o'clock, sat and talked it all over, and about everything and about--for an hour more. It was a happy day.

Well, I'm running on and on, and you'll think I'm a regular old pest. And anyway, you mustn't think it necessary to answer my letters. I might be moved to write you most anytime, so you must consider it just a hail which it is only necessary to greet in spirit. I'll probably "get" it. And believe me, with greatest appreciation and every good wish,

Yours faithfully,

Harold Wells

P.S.  
Hope you  
have noticed  
Whiting  
Williams'  
great book  
"What's on  
the workers'  
mind"