

March 30, 1936

Dear Mr. Smith:

I regret that I have been so long in looking over your manuscript - "The Drama of Abraham Lincoln." I did not get back until last week and then to a rather crowded desk so that it was only over the week-end that I had the opportunity to read and study what you have done.

It is an impressive piece of work. It is a real achievement to cover so long a period and have the scenes ~~so~~ thoroughly knit. It holds together remarkably well for so ambitious an undertaking. The tone is ~~lively~~ from start to finish. The foreword is unusually good, simple, direct, sufficient,

My criticism and suggestions are concerned with details. We can talk them over later if you wish. —

1) Several of the speeches seem to me too long for sustained dramatic effect. For instance Washington's speech, Page 18, would be more dramatic if shorter. Justice is too long in two or three places, also Bishop Soule. Sometimes the cutting out of a single sentence makes a speech more effective.

2) In several of Lincoln's speeches you are too rhetorical. When he is talking to Herndon or to members of his Cabinet he should be more colloquial. General all you do this, but would it not be more in character to lean towards the colloquial even in so serious a matter as when he is explaining what he intends to do about Sumter, about the emancipation proclamation?

3) You have caught the character of the various persons you introduce, excepting in the case of Herndon. You make him more humble than he was. As a matter of fact he was rather arrogant with Lincoln at times. He had no inferiority complex such as Lincoln had. I think if you would make him a little more out and out he would be more convincing.

His faith in Lincoln, his ideas on slavery - all of this is true. There is an occasional similar fault in other places. For instance on Page 130 when Mrs. Stowe is talking to Sally she said, "I have heard about it but you have made me see it in a new aspect, in one of the most sinister aspects." I think the words "aspect" and "sinister" are not in keeping to the rest of Mrs. Stowe's talk to Sally.

It is the same feeling about making Lincoln say to Herndon - Page 177 - as he is leaving him, "So long, Mr. Lincoln." Isn't "So long" a modern farewell? Was it used in that time? At least it grated on me.

4) There is a tendency at times to be repetitious. For instance on Page 94 in nine lines you use "Abe" five times. There is a slight tendency to be over rhetorical so there is a little tendency to be repetitious. It might be well to read the manuscript with an eye to the over rhetorical as well as to repetitions.

Page 250. You make Lincoln say that he thinks he realizes something of the way the Savior felt, etc., when he entered Jerusalem. I doubt if Lincoln would have compared himself with the Savior. Hay might very well have made that remark, but I doubt if Lincoln, himself, would have thought of himself in such connection. At least it was one of the things that offended me.

I wish you would consider using Lincoln's Springfield farewell as he spoke it. Your rendering of the speech weakens it in my mind. It is hard to improve on that speech, dear Mr. Smith.

I am a good deal of a stickler for historical accuracy naturally - my work having been so largely historical narrative without an attempt at dramatization and I naturally perhaps ask myself as I read whether the fact would not have been as dramatic as your substitute. I am thinking

particularly of the Vandavia case. It was a protest, not a resolution, that Lincoln offered, as you of course know. A very little change in text would take care of this though I doubt if you would have many readers that would raise the question.

These are not essential points that I have raised, my dear Mr. Smith. They are small matters perhaps, but matters I think which would improve the drama. There is so much that is noble, lofty about it; it is so sound in its logic and feeling that I would like to see it beyond reproach.

If you wish to talk the matter over with me I shall be so glad to make an appointment. I will hold the manuscript until I hear from you. We can perhaps make an engagement by telephone - Algonquin 4-6674.

I appreciate the check you send. I hope you think that the service rendered is worth the fee given.

Very sincerely yours