

PART I

*Letters, Interviews, and Statements Collected
by William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik,
1865–92*

1. *John L. Scripps to WHH*

Chicago, May 9th 1865.

My Dear Herndon:

I am glad you design giving us something about Lincoln. Your long acquaintance and close association with him must have given you a clearer insight into his character than other men obtained. I appreciate your compliment to the poor effort I made in 1860.¹ I do not think it a great stretch of modesty to say that if it were to be done over, I could improve upon it. It is gratifying to me, however, to see that the same qualities in Lincoln to which I then gave greatest prominence, are those on which his fame now chiefly rests. Is it not true that this is the leading lesson of Lincoln's life — that true and ending greatness, the greatness that will survive the corrosion and abrasion of time, change and progress, must rest upon character? In certain showy, and, what is said to be, most desirable endowments, how many Americans have surpassed him! Yet how he looms above them now! Not eloquence, nor logic, nor grasp of thought — nor statesmanship, nor power of command, nor courage — not any nor all of these have made him what he is — but these, in the degree in which he possessed them, conjoined to those certain qualities composed in the term *character*, have given him his fame — have made him for all time to come the great American Man — the grand central figure in American (perhaps the World's) History.

Send me whatever you may publish on the subject.

The plates on which the campaign life was printed were not preserved, and I have not been able to get a copy of it for you.

Very Truly Your
J. L. Scripps.

HL: LN2408, 2:340–41

1. A reference to Scripps's campaign biography, *Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Chicago, 1860).