Decatur, Illinois, November 25, 1872

Dear Sir,

I am just in receipt of yours of the 22nd instant. I have carefully read the whole of Col Sargent's life of Mr. Lincoln. It contains many things which I regret to see in print. Admitting them to be true, their publication was, to say the least, injudicious. Many things which are stated in the book were not necessary to the elucidation, or full comprehension, of Mr. Lincoln's character, and should have been omitted.

It is now almost forty years since I first made his acquaintance. From that time, till his death, our relations were very intimate. I think more so than is usual. Our friendship was close, warm, and sincere. I know mine for him was, and I never had reason to distrust his for me. Our relations, to my knowledge, were never interrupted for a moment.
I can recall no circumstance in his life which would justify a suspicion of treachery to his friends.

Of his religious opinions I am not able to say. It is more than probable we have conversed upon religious subjects; but, if we did, I am not able to recall back to my recollection anything which was said in such conversations, with such distinctness as to warrant me in repeating it. He held a pew in the Presbyterian Church of which Rev. Dr. Gurley was pastor, and often attended service there. He not infrequently sent his carriage, on Sunday mornings, with a request that I would accompany him and Mrs. Lincoln to church. Sometimes, after service was over, I would return with them to the White House to dinner, and spend the afternoon with him in the Library. On such occasions I have seen him reading the Bible, but never knew of his engaging in any other act of devotion. He did not invoke a blessing at table, nor did he have family prayers. What private religious devotions may have been customary with him I do not know. I have no knowledge...
of any.
At the time of his little son Melie's death, Mrs. Browning and I were out of the city, but returned to Washington on the evening of the same day of his death. The President and Mrs. Lincoln sent their carriage for us immediately upon learning that we were in the city, and we went to the White House, and remained with them about a week. This son Jack was also very ill at the time, and I watched with him several consecutive nights. The President was in the room with me a portion of each night. He was in very deep distress at the loss of Melie, and agitated with apprehensions of a fatal termination of Jack's illness; but what his religious views and feelings were I do not know. I heard no expression of them. My impression is that, during the time I remained at the White House, on this occasion, he had several interviews with the Rev. Dr. Gurley, but what occurred between them never came to my knowledge. Dr. Gurley is now dead, and I am unable to say whether he left any record of his
conferences with the President.

I know that Mr. Lincoln was a firm believer in a superintending and overruling Providence and in supernatural agencies and events. I know that he believed the destinies of men were, at least, that his own destiny was shaped and controlled, by an intelligence and power higher and greater than his own, and which could neither control nor thwart. To what extent he believed in the revelations and miracles of the Bible and Testament, or whether he believed in them at all, I am not prepared to say; but I do know that he was not a scoffer at religion during our long and intimate acquaintance and intercourse. I have no recollection of ever having heard an irreverent word fall from his lips.

The letter published in the biography purports to have been written to Mrs. Browning is genuine. In the winter of 1836-7 we were all at Vandalia, then the seat of government of this State. I was a member of the Senate, and Mr. Lincoln of the House of Representatives. He and I had been previously acquainted, but he then first made the acquaintance of Mrs. Browning. We all lived at the same house. We were fond of Mrs. Browning, and spent many of his evenings, and much of his leisure time, at our rooms. Mr.
were all there together, again, in the winter of 1857-8, the same relations subsisting between us as during the preceding winter. After our return home, in the Spring of 1858, the letter in question was received. We were very much amused with it, but both Mrs. Browning and myself supposed it to be a fiction, a creation of his brain; one of his funny stories, without any foundation of fact to sustain it. It was laid away, among other letters, and forgotten. In 1861 I was overhauling a correspondence which had been accumulating for years, and destroying many hundreds of letters which I regarded as no longer of any value. This, with other letters of Mr. Lincoln, was then exhumed, and saved from the common fate, only because it was amusing, and written a long time ago, in the very characteristic style of the then President. We permitted a few of our friends, both here, and at Washington, to see it, merely as a matter of curiosity and amusement; we still laboring under the impression that it was pure romance. I think it was in 1862 that a gentleman,
who was collecting materials for a biography of Mr. Lincoln, having heard of this letter called on Mrs. Browning in Washington and requested a copy. She declined to give it. The first time she was at the President's house only a few days after, she informed him of the request that had been made, and asked him what he had to say in regard to it.

She then first learned from him that the narrative of the letter was not fiction, but a true account of an incident in actual life. He added that others of the actors that were still living that it might be painful to them to see the letter in print; and that, on their account, he desired it should be withheld for the present; but that, hereafter, when those most interested should have passed away, she might exercise her own discretion.

After the death of Mr. Lincoln, one of his most intimate friends, Cal Sumner, who was on confidential relations with the President through the entire period of his administration, was permitted, at his earnest request, to take a copy, but upon the distinct understanding that it should never be used in connection with Mrs. Browning's name.

I do not see how Mr. Lincoln can justly be
censured for writing the letter. It was written in the confidence of friendship, with no purpose, or expectation, that it would ever become public. No names were mentioned, nor was it likely that any other name, than his own, would ever be known in connection with it. His only object seemed to be to amuse a friend at his own expense. No injury was done to anyone by the mere writing of the letter, nor would there have been by its publication, unaccompanied by the explanations given by his biographer, and for these Mr. Lincoln ought not to be held responsible. Neither Mrs. Browning nor myself ever knew, from him, who the lady referred to in the letter was. Of course, neither of us ever asked him, nor did he ever inform us. If the feelings of others have been injured, I think it is chargeable upon the biographer, and not upon Mr. Lincoln.

I am, at present, much occupied with professional duties, and have written you hastily, but have, I believe, answered all your enquiries as fully as I am now capable of doing.

It gives us great pleasure to hear that you are again comfortably settled in
your own home.

Mrs Browning and Emma unite
with me in kindest regards to Mrs
Arnold, your daughters and your
only your friend

O. H. Browning

Hon Isaac N Arnold
Chicago
Illinois