

5. ADVICE TO A YOUNG FRIEND

In 1848, while serving in Washington as a Congressman from Illinois, Lincoln received a letter from his young law partner, William H. Herndon, complaining of some fancied grievances he held against certain Illinois personages. The following excerpt from Lincoln's reply discloses not only his sound advice to young Herndon but reveals something of his own character as well.

The way for a young man to rise is to improve himself every way he can, never suspecting that anybody wishes to hinder him. Allow me to assure you that suspicion and jealousy never did help any man in any situation. There may sometimes be ungenerous attempts to keep a young man down; and they will succeed, too, if he allows his mind to be diverted from its true channel to brood over the attempted injury. Cast about, and see if this feeling has not injured every person you have ever known to fall into it.

Now, in what I have said, I am sure you will suspect nothing but sincere friendship. I would save you from a fatal error. You have been a laborious, studious young man. You are far better informed on almost all subjects than I have ever been. You cannot fail in any laudable object, unless you allow your mind to be improperly directed. I have somewhat the advantage of you in the world's experience, merely by being older; and it is this that induces me to advise.

LINCOLN TO HERNDON, JULY 10, 1848.

6. BEFRIENDING A SOLDIER'S WIDOW

William H. Herndon tells of a stirring scene in which Lincoln's righteous indignation was thoroughly aroused.

I once saw Mr. Lincoln look more than a man; he was inspired by the occasion. There was a man living here by the name of Erastus Wright; he was, his business rather was, to obtain pensions for the soldiers of the Revolution's heirs, widows, etc., the soldiers of 1812's widows, heirs, etc. An old revolutionary soldier's widow applied to Wright, about 1849-50 to get her pension, which amounted to about \$400. Wright made out the papers, got the pension, and charged the poor widow \$200, half of what he got. The poor old woman came into our office quite blind, deaf, and on crutches, and stated to Mr. Lincoln her case. Lincoln at once sympathized with the woman and said: "Wright shall pay you back \$100 or more." Lincoln went and saw Wright in person. Wright refused to refund. The old woman commenced suit,

Lincoln giving security for costs. The case finally got before the jury with all the facts of the case fully told. Lincoln loomed up, rose up to be about nine feet high, grew warm, then eloquent with feelings, then blasting as with a thunderbolt the miscreant who had robbed one that helped the world to liberty, to Wright's inalienable rights. Lincoln was inspired if man was ever inspired. The jury became indignant and would have torn Wright up, mobbed in a minute, burst into tears at one moment and then into indignation the next. The judge and spectators did the same, according to the term that Lincoln gave his eloquence. The jury made Wright disgorge all except about \$50.

HERNDON TO JESSE W. WEIK, NOVEMBER 12, 1885.