

**HE KNEW LINCOLN,  
AND OTHER BILLY  
BROWN STORIES**

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He knew Lincoln, and other Billy Brown stories by Ida M. Tarbell

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**IDA M. TARBELL**

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BY

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AUTHOR OF "LIFE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN"

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TO MY SISTER

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## INTRODUCTION

More than one clue must be unravelled to reach an understanding of Abraham Lincoln. Among them there surely must be reckoned his capacity for companionship. None more catholic in his selections ever lived. All men were his fellows. He went unerringly and unconsciously for the most part, to the meeting place that awaited him in each man's nature. There might be a wall, often there was; but he knew, no one better, that there is always a secret door in human walls. Sooner or later he discovered it, put his finger on its spring, passed through and settled into the place behind that was his.

His life was rich in companionships

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with unlikely people, often people who began by contempt or semi-contempt of him. There was the town bully of his youth, whom he soundly thrashed for trying a foul in a wrestling match, and who rose from the dust to proclaim Lincoln the best man who ever broke into camp; thirty years later there was his own Secretary of State, with his self-complacent assumption of the President's unfitness for leadership and of his own call to direct the nation, put gently but firmly in his place and soon frankly and nobly declaring, "He's the best of us all."

He had many pass-keys—wrath, magnanimity, shrewdness, patience, clarity of judgment, humor, resolve; and in the end, one or the other or all together opened every closed door, and he sat down at home with men of the most divergent view and experience: the bully, the scholarly, the cunning, the pious, the

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ambitious, the selfish, the great, the weak, the boy, the man.

Particularly was Lincoln at home with men like the Billy Brown of these pages, men whose native grain had not been obscured by polish and oil. There were many of them in his time in Illinois, plying their trades or professions more or less busily, but never allowing industry to interfere with opportunities for companionship. They were men of shrewdness, humor, usually modest, not over-weighted with ambition. Their appetite for talk, for politics, for reports on human exhibits of all sorts, never dulled. Their love of companionship outstripped even their naturally intolerant partisanship.

These men, unconsciously for the most part, resisted the social veneering that, beginning in Illinois in Lincoln's day, rapidly overlaid the state. In his first contact with Springfield in the '30's he