

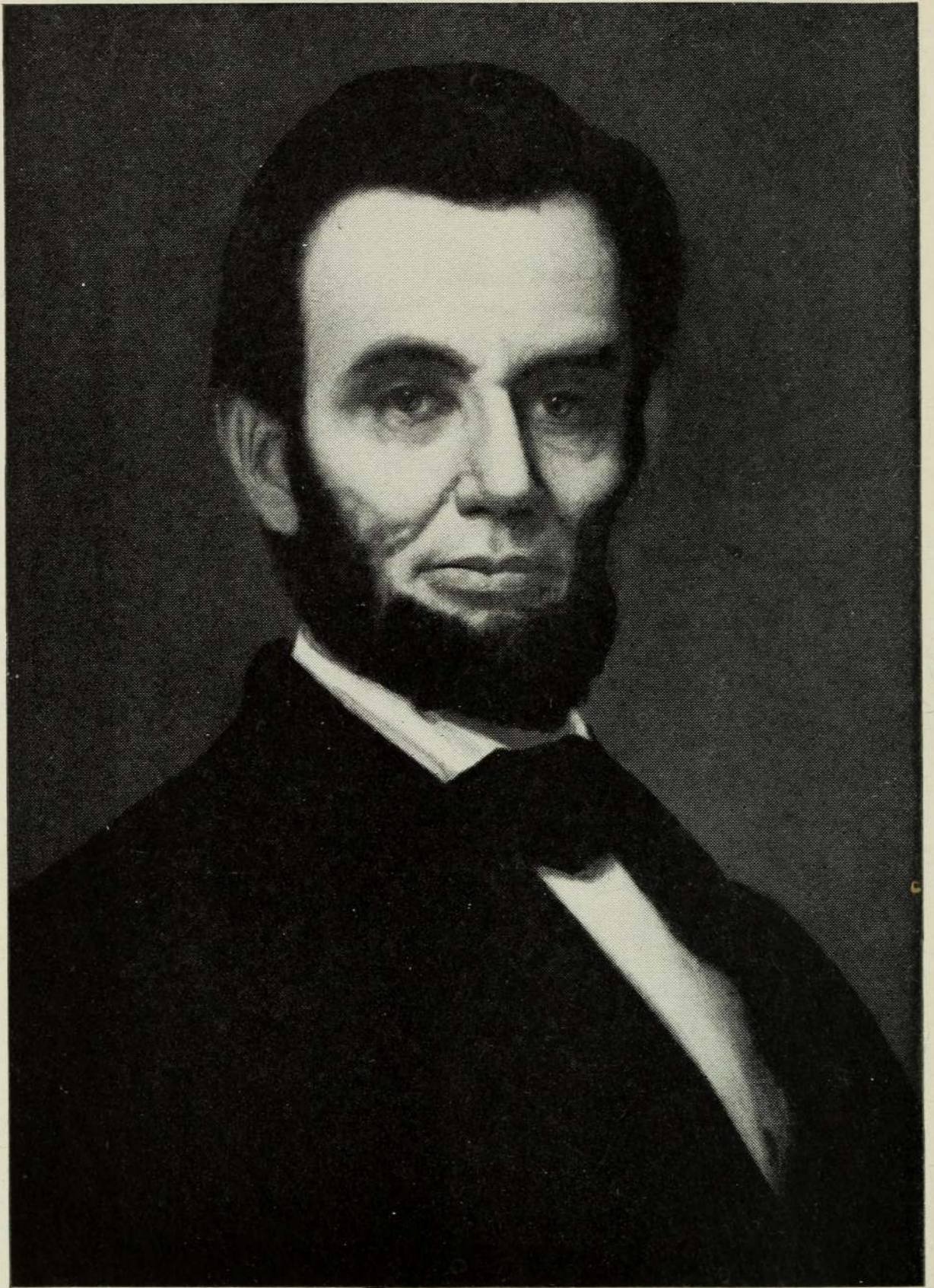


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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

&

THE WIDOW BIXBY

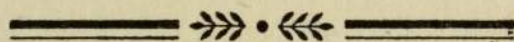


ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Abraham Lincoln
&
THE WIDOW BIXBY

By

F. LAURISTON BULLARD



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1946

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LINCOLN
Room

TO
THAT GENEROUS FRIEND
AND
MAGNANIMOUS LINCOLNIAN,
Edward Carleton Stone

21004 HSEARCY

IN CONFERENCE WITH OUR READERS

LET us talk matters over. Readers have every right to abandon a book, for whatever reason, after sampling a few pages, and those who carry on to the end will exercise their right of judgment. There are definite advantages, however, in preliminary explanations of "what" and "why." These are embodied usually in a formal, and too often formidable, introduction.

We prefer to invite a little group of prospective readers to a round-table discussion. We admit our inability to frame a satisfactory definition of that elusive personage known as "the average reader." All the same, we address ourselves not only to the fraternity of Abraham Lincoln specialists, but also to that vast company of average persons to whom Lincoln alluded, with profound respect, as the common people. We take our places at the table and await your questions.

"Well, what is the book about?"

In reality, it is a detective story. We try to guide the reader, through a maze of perplexities, to a conclusion that will satisfy the available facts.

"Yes; but what *is* the book about?"

It is about one of the two Lincoln topics which are of widest popular interest. One is the alleged Ann Rutledge romance. The other is the story of the famous letter which the President is supposed to have written to a widow whose five sons were understood to have

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been killed in the Civil War. It is this Bixby Letter, so called, with which we are concerned. Probably all of you have some knowledge of that letter. Some of you may have framed copies on your walls.

“Isn’t that an old story? Has it not been told many times in magazines and newspapers? Have not a lot of books been published about it? What excuse is there for another?”

Many articles and news items, yes; but only one book. The fact is that the letter is a subject of debate, and, indeed, of controversy. That the letter was delivered to Mrs. Bixby nobody denies, but nobody knows where it is. It disappeared, and after many years reappeared in the form of alleged facsimiles, which most Lincoln scholars believe to have been forgeries. Nor did the Boston widow lose five sons in the war.

“What you say is well-known. What has happened that calls for another book that revamps these familiar facts?”

Many things. And we emphatically declare that this is *not* simply a retelling of an old tale. The Lincoln specialists across the table know that forty years ago it began to be whispered about that Lincoln was not the writer of the letter. We must linger a little upon the matter. Statements to that effect in time got into print, a few of them under the names of persons whose standing entitles them to respectful consideration. They assume that the letter in fact was written—that is, composed—by President Lincoln’s assistant private secretary, John Hay, the future Secretary of State and Ambassador to England. A distinguished public man, in an autobiographical work, in 1939, provided

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the foundation for most of the arguments used by others who have written upon the subject. In that year one investigator published a magazine article in support of Hay's alleged authorship, and supplemented his statement by another article in the same magazine in 1941. And early in 1945 another writer, using essentially the same arguments, published his findings in a quarterly magazine. We do not agree with these views. We cheerfully add the weight of one or two other names to the witnesses placed on the stand by the persons we allude to. All of these names will appear in these pages. We think we have facts that offset their arguments. It is because we feel that these facts go far toward vindicating the orthodox opinion that Abraham Lincoln did write the Bixby letter that we offer this book.

By this time tokens not only of curiosity but also of excitement fluttered about the table. The two Lincoln specialists smiled complacently; they knew more or less about our evidence. But the delegates from the group we class as average readers plumped the next question: "Why not tell us now the names of the writers you allude to?"

Very well; here they are. The autobiographical work is *Across the Busy Years* by Nicholas Murray Butler, the long-time president of Columbia University. The magazine articles were written by Mr. Sherman Day Wakefield, who published them in *Hobbies* for February, 1939, and February, 1941, respectively. The quarterly mentioned is *Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine* for January, 1945, in which may be found Mr. David Rankin Barbee's article, "The Plain Truth about the Bixby Letter."

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There remain a few very proper questions which we notice you hesitate to ask. You would like to know the story which lies back of our venture into this field. The inquiry has been anticipated. Such matters, while personal, are pertinent. A primary source of information about the Bixby letter is the Massachusetts Military Archives, on file in the State House on Beacon Hill, within easy eyeshot of the desk across the Common which we occupied for many years. It was in 1908, at a time when the subject was one of occasional discussion, that we first read the Bixby papers in the Adjutant General's office. Since that time we have made the story of Mrs. Lydia Bixby and the President's letter a topic of occasional study, and in recent years of persistent investigation. By the writing of many letters and the examination of numerous documents and clippings a mass of material was accumulated, some of which was of definite importance. Certain friends heard of the valuable items in our hands. While the claim of John Hay's authorship of the letter was becoming widely known, many demands for the publication of our facts appeared in our mail. Until 1943, however, our editorial desk had the prior right to our time. When we quit that desk we gave the right of way to the Bixby problem.

We want all Lincolnians and all our readers to know of the aid we have received from the Lincoln specialists and personal friends whose names we are proud to recite at this table as a duty and a pleasure. We mention first Mr. Edward C. Stone, widely known as a Lincoln collector and as a lawyer and business man of Boston, who made an independent study of several

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phases of our inquiry and granted us the aid of certain members of his office force. One result of his studies was the paper which he read a few years ago before the Lincoln Group of Boston. Help of the very highest value was given also by Associate Justice Elwin L. Page of the Supreme Judicial Court of New Hampshire, a Lincoln scholar of national eminence, who read our manuscript not only once but three times. An associate justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, Raymond S. Wilkins, while on duty in Washington in 1945, managed to find time to examine with care in our behalf certain documents in the Library of Congress and in the National Archives.

No fewer than thirteen Lincoln authorities have read our manuscript and nearly all of them have made useful suggestions. Besides the three named above, the list, presented in alphabetical order, includes Paul M. Angle, director of the Chicago Historical Society; Oliver R. Barrett, Esquire, of Chicago; Professor Roy P. Basler of the University of Arkansas; Dr. Robert L. Kincaid, executive vice-president of Lincoln Memorial University; Professor R. Gerald McMurtry, director of that university's Department of Lincolniana; Professor James G. Randall of the University of Illinois, the author of many standard Lincoln works; Edgar J. Rich, Esquire, of Boston, who has devoted many years to his Lincoln studies; Associate Justice John V. Spalding of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court; William H. Townsend, Esquire, of Lexington, Kentucky, himself an authority on the Bixby letter; and Dr. Louis A. Warren, director of the Lincoln National Life Foundation of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

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Other scholars who have been cordially helpful are Fred Wilder Cross, former Military Archivist of Massachusetts; Miss Norma Cuthbert of the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Dr. Tyler Dennett, biographer of John Hay; the Honorable George A. Dondero, member of Congress from Michigan; the late Otis G. Hammond of the New Hampshire Historical Society; the late Logan Hay, Esquire, of Springfield, Illinois; William Easton Louttit, Jr., of Brown University; Professor Leon B. Richardson, biographer of William E. Chandler, of Dartmouth College; Dr. Henry B. VanHoesen, librarian of Brown University; and Probate Judge Carl E. Wahlstrom of Worcester, Massachusetts. Thanks also are due to various officials of the National Archives and of the Library of Congress for kindly courtesies. Two occasional correspondents must be named for their replies to pointed questions, Mr. Sherman Day Wakefield of New York City, and Mr. J. Alfred Spender of London, former editor of the *Westminster Gazette*.

And now, with our thanks for your kindly hearing, we would say that we have tried to deal fairly and squarely with the arguments with which we are unable to agree, and to conceal no facts known to us relating to Mrs. Bixby and her sons, or to any other persons involved in any way in our "case." We avow ourselves now, at the end of the trail, to be unable to accept any theory other than Abraham Lincoln's authorship of this message which so long has been cherished as one of those

"Kind letters that betray the heart's deep history."

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&
THE WIDOW BIXBY

THE ORIGIN OF THE LETTER

ONLY one question is really at issue in what Mr. Kendall Banning has called "The Case of Lydia Bixby."¹ The soaring rhetorical phrases which have been used by orators, essayists, and historians, in praise of this letter, which was sent from Washington to the widowed mother in Boston, are only of incidental interest in any inquiry as to its authorship. The errors of fact on which the letter is based have nothing to do with the case. We may regret these errors and we may wonder how they can be explained, but they do not alter the intrinsic worth and beauty of the letter. Nor is the character of Mrs. Bixby in any direct way relevant to the fundamental purpose of any such inquiry. Whether she deceived the adjutant general of Massachusetts or was herself innocently mistaken, whether she was above reproach or had fallen below the level of respectability, may be valid questions for research, but the answers, whatever they may be, have no connection with the fundamental issue. What we, and all sincere Lincolnians, seek is a convincing answer to the question which underlies all others: Did Abraham Lincoln, or John Hay, or some other person write that message of condolence? Is it what, in the *Collected*

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Works of the Civil War President it is assumed to be, a genuine Lincoln letter? In the discussion of that question the various subsidiary matters must have attention, however; they are secondary topics, which constantly obtrude upon the principal question, and they have been used by others to discredit the value of our letter.

SOME PRELIMINARIES

In dealing with the matters preliminary to our central inquiry, we think it well to notice a few things that have been said by those who deny the President's authorship. Whereas some of these might easily become subjects of controversy, we feel that nothing is gained, but on the contrary, that an argument is weakened, by any miscellaneous distribution of epithets. Mr. Wakefield, for example, is in error in some of his statements, but, although he seems to certain readers to write "like a man with a mission," he treats with respect those who hold other views, and in a personal letter he avows his sole intent to be to find out the truth. On the other hand, we are sorry to see Mr. Barbee indulging in such a sentence as "Mr. Sandburg is said to be a poet." By such an allusion he does not hurt Carl Sandburg at all, but he does damage himself. He refers to Professor Goldwin Smith as a "stern hater of the South and of Southern people."² That is not discriminating. That philosophical historian did not hate the South, but he did abominate slavery, and at the same time he criticized President Lincoln for viewing "as a rebellion that which was in fact a natural disruption," and again as

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“a natural severance of the slave-owning South from the free North.”³

“Who was *this* Mrs. Bixby?” Mr. Barbee asks. He replies: “God alone knows.” As we hope to show farther on, he is not an inerrant commentator on the Bixby family. He finds that two of Mrs. Bixby’s “alleged sons” were Oliver C. Bixby and Cromwell Bixby, Jr., and he refers to a certain woman’s “alleged marriages to both men.” The simple facts are that the name “Cromwell” ran in the family, that Lydia Parker married Cromwell Bixby; that his full name was Oliver Cromwell Bixby, and one of their sons was known usually as Cromwell Bixby, although his full name was Oliver Cromwell Bixby, Jr. We have correspondence from a granddaughter of Mrs. Bixby containing the family record, and this statement is supported by the Eben Putnam genealogy of the Bixby family. The record of Mrs. Lydia Bixby’s death is on file in the Archives and Records Division in the Office of the Secretary of State of Massachusetts. It is quite true that Mrs. Bixby did move from place to place in Boston in the years 1861 to 1878. In those eighteen years the old directories list her at seven addresses, and we glean two more from other sources. We have examined those reference works, as did the late Worthington C. Ford, then editor the Massachusetts Historical Society, and our results were identical. Mr. Barbee remarks that frequent removals, “as any old police reporter can verify, is characteristic of prostitutes.”⁴ We venture the suggestion that nine removals in eighteen years, an average residential period of two years, is not a very

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high frequency record, and that these may be attributed, as any ordinary citizen knows, to poverty.

The article in *Tyler's Quarterly* contains also several gratuitous aspersions upon the motives and the integrity of the men who brought about the writing of the President's letter. Not to dwell upon them, we mention only that the adjutant general is said to have been guilty of deception and fraud.⁵

LINCOLN AND THE SOLDIERS' VOTE

Several opinions also are exposed which have nothing whatever to do with the matter under discussion. One at least requires a word of comment. We are told that "the Presidential election of 1864 was in doubt, as all informed persons know, until the soldier vote was counted. That vote was not cast until late in October. McClellan, the Democratic nominee . . . might, as he probably did, get that vote." And in a note, "This, of course, is a controversial question, never to be settled. The soldier vote was in the hands of Edwin M. Stanton, who did many things worse than crooking a ballot-box. . . ." ⁶ We have ourselves looked carefully for evidence that might tend to substantiate these statements. We have found none. The most complete examination of the soldier vote that we know of may be found in the privately printed volume, containing the results of extensive studies of that subject by Josiah Henry Benton of Boston. State by state, he examined all the pertinent questions. He found that the soldiers' vote had no effect on Lincoln's re-election. Not more than 235,000 men cast ballots, either actually in the field or back home by proxy. The average in the states

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thus voting, taken together, was shown to have been three to one for Lincoln. That cautious and scholarly lawyer and historian concluded that "elections in the field were subjected to no undue influence."⁷ A Washington correspondent who included in a dispatch some years ago an assertion that the soldiers' vote "saved" Lincoln in 1864 was asked to demonstrate his claim. He resorted to the Library of Congress. The single authority produced there was the work here cited. In a letter he handsomely admitted his error. That standard authority, Edward Stanwood, accepts the same conclusion.⁸ The soldiers of only thirteen states did actually cast their ballots in the field. Stanwood tabulates their vote separately, and shows that in a popular vote of 4,000,000 only 150,000 were thus cast by the men in the army. Kentucky alone of those states was lost by the President. Four states—Connecticut, Minnesota, New York, and West Virginia—had adopted proxy voting for the soldiers. Only estimates could be made of the number cast under this system. No record of the votes cast by the soldiers of Missouri in the field could be found by Mr. Benton. But if Lincoln had lost all five of these states his electoral vote would have been 153 to 80 for McClellan, instead of 212 to 21.⁹

LINCOLN'S "ONLY" LETTER OF CONDOLENCE

A distinctly pertinent error in the *Quarterly* article is that "Mr. Wakefield unearthed the only known letter of condolence Lincoln probably ever wrote." The reference is to the letter to Miss Fanny McCullough of

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Bloomington, Illinois, whose father had been killed in battle early in 1862. The President knew the family well. Mr. Wakefield's statement, in his 1939 *Hobbies* article, was: "The author knows only one letter of condolence which can be definitely attributed to Lincoln." He did not at any time repeat that statement, and in a courteous personal letter in 1941 he said frankly: "You do not need to call my attention to one or two other Lincoln letters of condolence as I now know of them." Mr. Barbee apparently relies upon Mr. Wakefield's erroneous reference, unaware that a letter, somewhat similar in tone and content, was written by the President on May 25, 1861, and sent to the parents of Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth. That young man had spent some time as a student in the law office of Lincoln and Herndon and had organized the famous military company known as the Ellsworth Zouaves. He is believed to have been the first officer killed in the war. The tragedy took place in Alexandria, across the river from Washington, and the body was taken to the White House. We think we are justified in presenting the two letters in full. It will be noticed that whereas Mr. Barbee says "there is no consolation of religion" in the letter to Fanny McCullough, "for he did not know how to convey that," there is a definite invocation of divine consolation in the letter to Colonel Ellsworth's parents. We quote this letter from the facsimile, included, "by the courtesy of Mr. Judd Stewart," the then owner of the original, by Mr. Frederick H. Meserve, in a brochure privately printed for the Quill Club of New York in 1916.¹⁰

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“Washington, D. C.

May 25, 1861

To the Father and Mother of Col.

Elmer E. Ellsworth:

My dear Sir and Madam,

In the untimely loss of your noble son, our affliction here, is scarcely less than your own. So much of promised usefulness to one's country, and of bright hopes for one's self and friends, have rarely been so suddenly dashed, as in his fall. In size, in years, and in youthful appearance, a boy only, his power to command men, was surpassingly great. This power, combined with a fine intellect, an indomitable energy, and a taste altogether military, constituted in him, as seemed to me, the best natural talent, in that department, I ever knew. And yet he was singularly modest and deferential in social intercourse. My acquaintance with him began less than two years ago; yet through the latter half of the intervening period, it was as intimate as the disparity of our ages, and my engrossing engagements, would permit. To me, he appeared to have no indulgences or pastimes; and I never heard him utter a profane, or an intemperate word. What was conclusive of his good heart, he never forgot his parents. The honors he labored for so laudably, and, in the sad end, so gallantly gave his life, he meant for them, no less than for himself.

In the hope that it may be no intrusion upon the sacredness of your sorrow, I have ventured to ad-

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*dress you this tribute to the memory of my young
friend, and your brave and early fallen child. May
God give you that consolation which is beyond all
earthly power.*

*Sincerely your friend
in a common affliction—*

A. Lincoln.”

The kind and comforting letter to Miss McCullough, written nineteen months later, is different in tone, adapted as it was to the age and situation of a sorrowing young woman.¹¹

*“Executive Mansion,
Washington, December 23, 1862*

Dear Fanny:

It is with deep grief that I learn of the death of your kind and brave Father; and, especially, that it is affecting your young heart beyond what is common in such cases. In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all; and, to the young, it comes with bitterest agony, because it takes them unawares. The older have learned to ever expect it. I am anxious to afford some alleviation of your present distress. Perfect relief is not possible, except with time. You cannot now realize that you will ever feel better. Is not this so? And yet it is a mistake. You are sure to be happy again. To know this, which is certainly true, will make you some less miserable now. I have had experience enough to know what I say; and you need only to believe it, to feel better at once. The memory

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of your dear Father, instead of an agony, will yet be a sad, sweet feeling in your heart, of a purer and holier sort than you have known before.

Please present my kind regards to your afflicted Mother.

Your sincere friend,

A. Lincoln."

AN APPEAL TO THE TIMES

Inasmuch as the article in the *Quarterly* alludes, in a note, to "a fresh outburst of the Bixby mania . . . in August, 1925, through the publication of a letter from F. Lauriston Bullard . . . in *The* [London] *Times* we include here a record of what then took place. In *The Boston Herald* of August 25 of that year a statement, signed by the writer mentioned, was published, with the intention of correcting various misapprehensions which were becoming widespread. In part this personal memorandum read as follows:—

“. . . Quite naturally one who visits Oxford may make inquiries about this letter. Indeed our inquiries began in London where an investigator stated with emphasis that careful and patient research had convinced him that the letter is not in the university city. Direct inquiries were made at the Bodleian with similar results. "That question is asked about once a month. . . . We have examined the question. . . . It is not here. . . . We surely would know if it were here. . . . We would know if it were in any of the colleges of the university. . . . We do not believe it ever was here. . . . If a facsimile ever has been in any of the colleges it

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must have disappeared long ago. . . . We do not know how the story that it is here originated.' And so on—careful questioning and patient replying. . . .

“But musing at the hotel that evening, the American questor did what so many before him have done—he wrote *The Times*. Merely a simple statement of the facts, raising the question, ‘where is the original,’ and suggesting that some of the readers of the newspaper might ‘be able to supply useful information.’ The cable did the rest. *The New York Times* and the Boston papers took up the matter, and the interesting communications which since have appeared constitute in themselves some comforting alleviation of our disappointment in not finding even a copy in England.

“We fear now that no new facts will be uncovered in England. The lapse of time is considerable, as the letter to *The Times* was dated ‘Randolph Hotel, Oxford, July 28.’ Two additional and perhaps significant matters may be noted. The most important question asked by the Oxford parties was this: ‘What is the date of the earliest known facsimile?’ . . . And the London investigator mentioned above ventured the opinion that the original might be in the possession of a certain distinguished British statesman not now in public life, but whose name is known all over the world. Our letter to *The Times* we hoped might catch his eye and possibly induce him to furnish information, provided he has any information in his keeping.”

The name of this statesman was not communicated in confidence, and after this long interval of years there is no reason for withholding it, so to complete this record it is here given. It was Lord Rosebery. Shortly

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after the publication of the letter in *The Times* the writer sailed from Liverpool. He was astonished on reaching home to learn what the cable had done. Newspaper cuttings came to him in swarms. Some of them were useful enough for preservation. Most of them were tales many times told or wild guesses. And still there were a few men, informed Lincolnians, who continued to insist that they had seen the Bixby original, or a facsimile, in "one of the Oxford colleges." We admit that we do not quite abandon the possibility that at some time a copy of the letter may have been on display somewhere in that university.

MRS. BIXBY COMES ON THE SCENE

Soon after the end of the Civil War, William Schouler, adjutant-general of Massachusetts, published a comprehensive record of the share of his state in the conflict, which is accepted as an excellent authority. He introduces us to Mrs. Bixby and her sons. "On the 21st of September [1864]," he says, "the Governor [John A. Andrew] received a letter from Otis Newhall, of Lynn, asking for the discharge of his son, James O. Newhall, of the Eleventh Regiment, who had been wounded in the battle of Spottsylvania, sent to the United States General Hospital at Readville [a few miles outside of Boston], and, on recovering from his wounds, had again gone to the front. In the meanwhile, the Eleventh Regiment's original term of service had expired, and the men who did not re-enlist had returned home, and been discharged." Mr. Newhall gave the reasons for asking the discharge of his son. "He had enlisted in December, 1861, as a recruit for the

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Eleventh Massachusetts, expecting to be mustered out with the regiment, which expectation was not realized.”

As the correspondence which ensued is of importance for the understanding of the questions involved in any study of the Bixby letter, it is given below almost in full. Quoting from the Newhall letter, General Schouler continued:

“‘From the time he was mustered into service until he was wounded at Spottsylvania, he was never absent from duty, never having spent an hour in hospital, but was, as I am informed by his captain, a good soldier throughout; taking part in most of the battles in which that grand old regiment was engaged. He is one of my five sons that went to sustain the honor of their country in the early part of the Rebellion; and I cannot but take pride in referring to them as having performed their duty nobly and well. Two of them remain at the front; one was lost at the second battle of Bull Run; one other was taken prisoner, after being wounded, in the battle of the Wilderness in May last, and is now somewhere among the rebels. The other is the one referred to. None of them, excepting the latter, have been at home during their entire period of service. And now, Governor, I write to ask from you a word of recommendation to the proper authorities for his discharge. I refer your Excellency to Adjutant-General Schouler and Hon. E. S. Davis, at the State House, to whom I am personally known.’”

On the back of this letter, the governor in his own swift script, made this request of General Schouler:

“Will the Adjutant-General please report whether, by the rule adopted by the War Office, this man comes

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within the category of those entitled to discharge under our order No. 28, 1862.”

General Schouler, on the third day following, informed the Governor that “only recruits who went into old regiments between the 21st of July and the 31st of December, 1862, are entitled to be mustered out when the terms of service of their regiments expire,” and, consequently, the Newhall case “does not come within the rule adopted by the War Department in regard to General Order No. 28, series of 1862.”

The adjutant-general then went on to say: “The statements made by Mr. Newhall I know to be true. He had five sons in the Army, and they have been good soldiers. I think, therefore, that he presents a strong claim for a favorable consideration of his application. Perhaps the Secretary of War would order the young man’s discharge, if he knew he was one of five brothers who have served faithfully almost from the beginning of the Rebellion.”

And now the Widow Bixby comes on the scene. General Schouler seizes this opportunity to describe her situation. Continuing his “report” he wrote:

“Pardon me if I add a word in regard to a still more remarkable case than the one presented by Mr. Newhall. Your Excellency may remember that I had the honor two years ago to speak to you of a widow lady, Mrs. Bixby, in the middle walks of life, who had five sons in the Union army, one of whom was wounded at Antietam, and was sent to a hospital in Baltimore or Washington. She was very anxious to go and see him, and your Excellency was kind enough to draw your check for forty dollars (\$40) to pay her expenses; and

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she made her journey. The boy recovered, and joined his regiment again. About ten days ago, Mrs. Bixby came to my office, and showed me five letters from five different company commanders, and each letter informed the poor woman of the death of one of her sons. Her last remaining son was recently killed in the fight on the Weldon Railroad. Mrs. Bixby is the best specimen of a true-hearted Union woman I have yet seen. She lives now at No. 15 Dover Street Place. Each of her sons, by his good conduct, had been made a sergeant.”¹²

THE WAR DEPARTMENT RECORDS

These letters were kept by the governor for his own files, after copies had been made for transmission to Washington. On the back of the Schouler letter this notation was stamped:

“COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS,
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT,
Boston, September 24, 1864.”

Below this official filing reference, the governor, in the handwriting which always looked as though the pen could not keep pace with his thoughts, wrote the following endorsement:—

“I send these copies: 1st, the letter of Mr. Otis Newhall, of Lynn, Mass., father of five sons, all of whom entered the Union army,—one of whom was killed, one of whom is a prisoner held by the rebels, two of whom are at the front,—asking the discharge of the fifth son, who has once been wounded. Under the circumstances, I think that an exercise of the

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*power to discharge at discretion would do good, and be a grateful recognition of the claims of a patriotic family. 2d, A report to me by the Adjutant-General of Massachusetts on this case, in which he mentions the case of a widow, Mrs. Bixby, who sent five sons, all of whom have recently been killed. This is a case so remarkable, that I really wish a letter might be written her by the President of the United States, taking notice of a noble mother of five dead heroes so well deserved.”*¹³

These proposals were characteristic of the ardent, generous, and noble-minded executive of the commonwealth. From him came the original suggestion that Lincoln should write the widow Bixby. His communication set the wheels in motion in the War Department. A notation indicates the first twirl of the correct cog in the cumbersome apparatus by which appeals were investigated, evidence obtained, and petitions denied or granted. Of necessity, it took time. From this notation, as given below, we learn the date of the arrival of Governor Andrew's documents in Washington:

“Respectfully referred to the Adjutant-General for report

James A. Hardie, Col. Ins. Genl.

War Department, Sept. 26, 1864.”

On the following day the documents were among the many that doubtless came to hand in the office of the adjutant-general. The notation is only a single line:

“Received A.G.O., Sept. 27, 1864.”

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It is hardly probable that all desks were "cleared" day by day in the department. There was an interval of three days, and then an assistant adjutant-general, Major Thomas M. Vincent, in a letter dated October 1, asked General Schouler to furnish him with the names, companies, and regiments of the two groups of five sons. The original of Major Vincent's request is missing, but the fact is established by the opening sentence of Schouler's reply. Writing on October 12, he said:

"I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the first instant requesting me to send you the names of the five sons of Mrs. Bixby, and of Otis Newhall, who were in the military service; also the regiments and companies to which they belonged." That of course was the necessary precaution by which the government would seek to protect itself against innocent error or deliberate deception. General Schouler continued with the two sets of records, and signed his report, in the style of the day, "Very respectfully, Your obedient servant."¹⁴

Various guesses have been offered to account for the interval of eleven days between the date of Vincent's request and the date of Schouler's reply; indeed, the adjutant-general on Beacon Hill has been censured for slipshod ways of doing business. Such speculations are of no value. Without doubt the adjutant-general would go first to the records in his own office. Whether his force was inadequate or the filings inefficiently arranged, we do not know, but it seems clear that what was wanted was not available at the State House, or that General Schouler considered it advisable to verify

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or amplify what he found by consultation with the father in the one case and with the mother in the other. He sent word to both of them on the same day. Vincent's letter was written on a Saturday. Two Sundays intervened between that day and the day of Schouler's answer. He probably received Vincent's request on Monday. It was on Friday, the fourth day thereafter, that he sent for information to Mr. Newhall and Mrs. Bixby, in the one instance by letter, in the other by messenger. Lynn is not very far from Boston and Newhall would no doubt receive his letter on Saturday. But Schouler was asking him to come to his office in Boston, and the visit would be made on Monday, the tenth. Whether the messenger found Mrs. Bixby on his first call we cannot know. We may be sure that simple natural difficulties might explain that eleven-day interval, if it needs explanation, and we are not sure that it does. In his letter to Newhall, the adjutant-general implies that he had been searching his own files. He wrote:

"Oct. 7, 1864

Mr. Otis Newhall, Lynn, Mass.

Dear Sir: I wish you would come to my office tomorrow or Monday, as I have a request from the Adjutant-General of the United States that I should furnish him with the names of your five sons, together with the regiments and companies to which they belong, which I cannot do without seeing you.

Respectfully yours,

William Schouler."

Abraham Lincoln & the Widow Bixby
And General Schouler's messenger to Mrs. Bixby
carried the following note:

“Oct. 7, 1864

Mrs. Bixby, No. 15 Dover St. Place, Boston, Mass.

Dear Madam: Will you please give the bearer of this the names of your five noble sons who have fallen for their country and the rights of mankind; also, the regiments, and if possible the companies they were in; also when they died, and the battles in which they were killed or wounded. I want this information for the War Department.

Respectfully yours,

*William Schouler, Adjutant-General.”*¹⁵

The letter of October 12, with the information thus acquired, was received at the office in Washington, according to the notation it carries, on October 18. And this is an interval of time not easy to account for. On a separate sheet attached to the letter is a statement, dated October 28, “respectfully submitted to the Secretary of War,” and signed by Samuel Breck, as assistant adjutant-general, in which he recapitulates the information contained in the letters quoted above, recommends the discharge of Private James O. Newhall, and concludes thus: “Governor Andrew desires that a letter may be written Mrs. Bixby by the President—such as the noble mother of five dead heroes so well deserves.”

Just below this statement by Colonel Breck there is found a note, written in pencil, by Colonel James A. Hardie, addressed to the assistant secretary of war:

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"Mr. Dana:

Please look at these remarkable cases.

J. A. H."

And beneath this, also in pencil, is a line containing a single abbreviated word and a set of initials,

"*App'd.* *C. A. D.,*"

which implies that the then assistant secretary, Charles A. Dana, later to be known as the keen and caustic editor of *The Sun*, approved favorable action on both the suggestions of Governor Andrew. In another hand there is penciled across the Dana endorsement this line: "Coe. Is there anything to be done with Gov. Andrew's recommendation? L. H. P." We suppose these were departmental clerks.¹⁶

It would seem, "on the face of the returns," that these documents aroused the officers through whose hands they passed to a high and sincere degree of interest, although they were handling day after day hundreds of applications for favors of many kinds. These were not ordinary "cases." They were "remarkable." Nor were they concluded without what was regarded as sufficient investigation.

ARE ANY RECORDS MISSING?

The letters and documents here cited are in the National Archives in Washington. They were examined by a representative of *The New York Times*, in the files of the War Department, on August 6, 1925. In aid of the present investigation, the Hon. Raymond S. Wilkins, associate justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, inspected them in the National

Application for a Mother's Pension

STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS, }
County of Suffolk. } *scf.*

On this *twenty first day of May*, A. D. one thousand eight hundred and sixty-*three*, personally appeared before the assistant Clerk of the Superior Court, within and for the County and State aforesaid, *Lydia Bixby* a resident of *Boston* in the County of *Suffolk* and State of *Massachusetts* aged *fifty* years, who, being first duly sworn according to law, doth on her oath make the following declaration, in order to obtain the benefits of the provision made by the Act of Congress, approved July 14, 1862: That she is the *widow* of *Croiswell Bixby* and mother of *Charles N. Bixby* who was a *sergeant* in Company *D* commanded by *Capt. Murphy* in the *twentieth* Regiment, of *Massachusetts Volunteers* in the war of 1861, who *was killed in battle near Fredericksburgh Va. on the 3^d May 1863*

She further declares that her said son, upon whom she was wholly or in part dependent for support, having left no widow or minor child under sixteen years of age surviving, declarant makes this application for a pension under the above-mentioned Act, and refers to the evidence filed herewith, and that in the proper department, to establish her claim.

She also declares that she has not, in any way, been engaged in, or aided or abetted, the rebellion in the United States; that she is not in the receipt of a pension under the 2d section of the Act above-mentioned, or under any other Act, nor has she again married since the death of her son, the said *Charles N. Bixby*

Lydia Bixby

*A portion of a pension document of May 21, 1863,
carrying one of the two known signatures
of Mrs. Bixby.*

Archives on July 20, 1945. Mr. Barbee writes that "The New York Times had its Washington correspondent investigate the matter, and he 'discovered that the original War Department records in the Bixby case were charged out to the then secretary of war, Edwin M. Stanton, on Oct. 28, 1864, but were not put back in the official files, for they are not there now.'" ¹⁷ To

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clear up this seeming contradiction of testimony we present the facts as to the fine service performed by the *Times* in that month of August, 1925, in digging out and printing important records in "the Bixby case." *The Boston Herald*, through its ownership of the *Times* news service, and independently, contributed valuable items also.

The *Times* [New York] on August 3 printed Mr. Bullard's letter from the London paper, and raised the question "Where is the Bixby Letter?" On the following day the New York paper presented the results of inquiries which had been made of Victor H. Paltsits, of the Manuscript Department of the New York Public Library. He informed the paper that the director of the Bodleian Library and the principal of Brasenose College at some previous time had written him that the letter never had been on display in Oxford University. *The Times* of August 5 contained a two-column "special" from one of its Washington correspondents which justified the caption "All Trace Lost of Bixby Letter." That dispatch contains the sentence quoted above from Mr. Barbee's article, and the following comments upon the failure to find the Bixby records. "It is probable," said the reporter, "that Stanton obtained the papers to bring them to the attention of President Lincoln, who in his letter to Mrs. Bixby said he had been shown 'in the files of the War Department a statement. . . .' Among the Bixby papers charged to Secretary Stanton was probably the original of the letter from the adjutant-general of Massachusetts. . . . Whether the papers were delivered to and not returned by President Lincoln, or after being charged to Secretary Stanton,

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were returned by him to the files, does not appear in the records examined by War Department officers today, which merely show that they were charged out to Stanton without any notation of their return." These remarks tend to dull the edge of the sharp assertion that the records had never been returned to the departmental files.

The *Times* had nearly three columns on this general subject on the next day, August 6. The correspondent reported the results of a search in the Pension Bureau. He said: "What has become of the original of the Bixby letter apparently still is a mystery. It was thought possible that after Secretary of War Stanton charged out the Bixby files from the War Department . . . the papers might have been sent to the Pension Bureau, but this idea was dispelled when investigation there showed only the usual documents in such a case." He quoted at length from Schouler's reply to Vincent, and noted that Vincent's application to Schouler for information, as we have indicated heretofore, was "not found today" in the War Department files. He ventured the opinion that "evidently the Secretary [Stanton] briefed the case from the now missing papers and handed this epitome to President Lincoln." Nor did the official War Department records entirely "jibe" with the records sent by Schouler of the military service of the Bixby brothers. This dispatch, with a good deal of information about the Bixbys, shows definitely that the war records of four of the five were in the departmental files in 1925. Moreover the article verifies the common understanding of their mother's name. The President addressed her simply as "Mrs. Bixby." The reporter

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said that the Pension Bureau papers "well establish" her identity. The name "seen this afternoon on old papers in the Bureau" was "Mrs. Lydia Bixby." The files also contained affidavits that she was the widow of Cromwell Bixby, whom she had married on September 26, 1826.

Now we come to the most comprehensive and important dispatch of this series, filling three columns of the *Times* of August 7. The correspondent seems to have been proud of his findings. At the top of his dispatch, he said: "The authenticity of the famous Lincoln letter to Mrs. Lydia Bixby . . . seems to be established beyond shadow of a doubt by original records found in the files of the War Department." Also: "The records, *made available today for the first time*, [author's italics] include . . ." and there follows a series of citations *in extenso*. And at the end of his article, the investigator wrote: "Believing that *the records disclosed today* [author's italics] were actually handled by President Lincoln and that they are the ones to which his letter to Mrs. Bixby refers, War Department officers place high value on them and have preserved them with great care." The dispatch contains Newhall's plea to Governor Andrew, Schouler's report to the governor, with his reference to the "still more remarkable case of Mrs. Bixby," the governor's annotation, Schouler's report to Vincent with the war records of the Newhalls and the Bixbys, Breck's statement, and the notations by Hardie, the "A.G.O.," "J. A. H.," and "C. A. D.," all of which we have noted heretofore. It seems to us that Mr. Barbee must have seen all these *Times* dispatches, but the ambiguity of

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his references has been remarked by several of his readers.

The *Times* series includes also a "special," printed on August 8, dealing with the publication of the Bixby letter, and some smaller items on later dates.

For Otis Newhall the sequel of the official correspondence was an order, issued on November 9, 1864, by the Adjutant-General's Office in the War Department, that "Private James O. Newhall, of Company B, the Eleventh Massachusetts Volunteers . . . will be discharged the service of the United States upon receipt of this order at the place where he may be serving." The discharge took place on November 15. And for Mrs. Bixby the outcome is recorded in Schouler's *History* in only a couple of lines: ". . . President Lincoln wrote Mrs. Bixby a letter full of sympathy and deep feeling, which we had the pleasure of placing in her hands."¹⁸ The words thus delivered were these:

"Executive Mansion

Washington, Nov. 21, 1864

Dear Madam: I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts, that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle.

I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save.

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I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours, to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of Freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

A. Lincoln.”¹⁹

Mrs. Bixby.

A BARRAGE OF “WHYS?”

Such are the recorded facts as to the origin of the Bixby letter. Many questions have been asked by casual readers and professional students for which no conclusive answers have been found. We are told that one “would expect to find all the documents—the complete history—relating to the Bixby letter and the woman to whom it was written” in Schouler’s “two large volumes,” and we are asked “why did General Schouler not quote the letter itself? Had he come in 1868 to know that Mrs. Bixby was a fraud?”²⁰ There is no way to learn why the historian did not print the letter, nor to know what, after four years, may have been his opinion of Mrs. Bixby. But he must have known that there were mistakes in the report which he had sent to Governor Andrew as to the service records of two of the Bixby brothers. The newspapers had printed the new facts which had been discovered and for the newspaper men at the capital of Massachusetts the adjutant-general of the commonwealth was a primary source of information. That office was a regular point for them to cover. Week after week, perhaps day after day, reporters hiked up Beacon Hill from Newspaper Row on special

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errands, and men assigned to the State House would always be alert, hovering about the offices in which news would originate. It is quite reasonable to assume that General Schouler was on intimate terms with many newspaper men.

Also the question is asked: "Why, if they existed, did not he [Schouler] quote all of the documents relating to this case—documents later quoted by Barton and other myth-makers?"²¹ We regret such animadversions. The documents do exist, with the important exception of the letters brought to Schouler by Mrs. Bixby, and, of course, the actual letter which he placed in her hands. Like other historians, the late Dr. William E. Barton made mistakes, but it is difficult to find errors of fact in his book on the Bixby letter, *A Beautiful Blunder*, and we are unable to discover any evidence that he fabricated any facts or documents therein. Many important additional facts have been found, however, since he published his book in 1926.

That there were errors in the records sent from the State House in Boston to the War Department in Washington is well known. The first mistake is found in Schouler's letter of September 24. He says that each of Mrs. Bixby's sons had been made a sergeant. In fact, one was a sergeant, one a corporal, and the others privates.

It is appropriate, we think, to include here an account of the army service of the five brothers. Our original source of information is the National Archives. On April 2, 1945, we received from the Adjutant-General's Office of the War Department, a checked reply, item by item, to a list which we had submitted

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for correction. Three errors were corrected, and six additions were inserted. The list below is therefore a War Department list. We carefully indicate the sources of the additional information which we record.

THE BIXBY BROTHERS'

WAR RECORD

Sergeant Charles N. Bixby—Company D, 20th Massachusetts Infantry—Mustered in July 28, 1862—Killed at Fredericksburg, Virginia, May 3, 1863.

Corporal Henry C. Bixby—Company K, 32nd Massachusetts Infantry—Mustered in August 13, 1862—Captured July 1, 1863, at Gettysburg—In Richmond prison July 21 to 25, 1863—Paroled at City Point, Virginia, March 7, 1864—Reported at College Green Barracks, Maryland, March 9, 1864—Furloughed April 16, 1864, for 25 days—Returned May 6, 1864—Honorably discharged at Boston, December 17, 1864.

General Schouler, in his letter of October 12, 1864, to Major Vincent, said: "Killed at Gettysburg, July, 1863." A news article in the *Boston Traveller*,²² of November 26, 1864, said: "Killed at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863."

Private Oliver C. Bixby—Company E, 58th Massachusetts Infantry—Killed in action, near Petersburg, July 30, 1864.

Schouler wrote Vincent that he was "mustered in March 4, 1864."

Private George A. Way (Bixby)—Company B, 56th Massachusetts Infantry—Captured at Petersburg July 30, 1864—In prison at Richmond August 31, 1864, and at Salisbury, North Carolina, October 9, 1864. A

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letter in War Department records shows that he died
at Salisbury.

Schouler wrote Vincent that he was "mustered in
March 19, 1864, and killed before Petersburg, July 30,
1864," and added: "He enlisted under the assumed
name of George Way. The reason why he did not en-
list under his proper name was to conceal the fact of
his enlistment from his wife." Our own notes made
years ago contain the following memorandum of an
official reply to an inquiry in December, 1893:

*"Record and Pension Office,
War Department, Washington, D. C.
Dec. 8, 1893.*

Adjutant-General Massachusetts:

*George Way was enrolled March 16, 1864, at
Chelsea, Mass. [a suburb of Boston] for three
years, or during the war, and mustered into service
as a private in Co. B, 56th Regt., Mass. Vol. Inf.
Captured July 30, 1864 near Petersburg, Va. Con-
fined at Richmond, Va., August 31, 1864, and at
Salisbury, N. Car., Oct. 9, 1864. Deserted to the
enemy from Salisbury, No. Car., date not shown.*

*By authority of the Secretary of War,
F. C. Ainsworth, Colonel, U. S. A.,
Chief of Office."*

The Honorable Fred Wilder Cross, who retired a
few years ago after a long period of expert service as
military archivist of Massachusetts, discovered addi-
tional entanglements of which due notice must be
taken. In July, 1862, Governor Andrew commissioned
Mr. Gardiner Tufts, whom he afterward made a lieu-

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tenant colonel in recognition of his valuable work as agent for Massachusetts in Washington. He was to watch the hospitals, look after disabled Massachusetts soldiers, write their families, forward supplies, and in general promote the welfare of the troops from his state. His office employed about a score of men. From that office 25,000 letters were mailed. "During the general exchange of prisoners, which began in December, 1864, a force of the agency was maintained at Annapolis, Maryland, and information of great value obtained in regard to our men who had suffered and died in rebel prisons, and much needed assistance was rendered."²³ Mr. Cross brings forward a letter from Colonel Tufts' Washington office, dated March 28, 1865, to Surgeon General Dale of Massachusetts, in which he wrote:

"The following memorandum was sent to me by my visitor at Annapolis and is respectfully forwarded for any action which you may deem proper. 'George W. Way, Co. B, 56th Mass., died at Salisbury, N. C. His real name was George W. Bixby—his mother lives at 115 Dover St. Place, Boston.—Lieut. J. B. Davis of Gloucester, Mass., owes him \$200.—1st Sergeant Jacobs, Co. B, 56th Regt. owes him \$50 and has all his accounts.'"²⁴

In view of the value attached by Governor Andrew to the work of Colonel Tufts, and the high praise given him by Adjutant-General Schouler, we find it difficult to agree with Dr. Barton that the evidence of this "unnamed visitor" is worthless. It does not necessarily follow that a man who deserts a wife, for some unknown reason, would desert his country, and that at a

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time when the enemy was fighting against hopeless odds. A member of another company in the same regiment is said by Dr. Barton to have reported "as a fact of his personal knowledge" that George Way did desert.

Another useful bit of evidence is contained in the Bixby genealogy. The adjutant-general of the United States Army, in a letter of June 17, 1914, reported that "from as extended a search of the records as it is practicable to make from the data furnished, nothing has been found to show that a person named George Way or George Way Bixby was a member of any Confederate organization."²⁵

So, on the one hand the files of the War Department contain a letter which shows that this Bixby died at Salisbury, and on the other hand the Pension Office has officially informed the State of Massachusetts that he deserted to the enemy at Salisbury. Also we note that the War Department was unable thirty years ago to find any indication of George Way having joined any enemy organization, and *per contra* that, according to the word of a member of another company in the same regiment, he did join the enemy. Feeling that he was entitled to the benefit of the doubt arising from this conflict of authorities, the state historians give both accounts in their published records of *Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors and Marines in the Civil War*. In our judgment this was not only the generous but the fair thing to do.

Private Edward Bixby. The War Department reports no record found.

Schouler in his reply to Vincent wrote: "Recruit for 22nd Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers. Died of

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wounds at Folly Island, So. Car. He ran away from home and was mustered in the field." Here again Mr. Cross comes forward with a discovery, but in this instance he untangles a snarl. Nowhere in his alphabetical files could he find an "Edward Bixby," but on an enlistment paper he did hit upon the name of "Arthur Edward Bixby," of Boston, eighteen years of age, a shoemaker and single, living at 10 Harrison Avenue. On the same sheet he found the name "Charles Bixby," described as a "bootmaker," also living at "10 Harrison Avenue." The trade was "right," the address was "right," and the name "Arthur" was crowded on the paper in front of the "Edward," exactly as though the boy had put it there as an afterthought. The archives data show further that this Bixby transferred into "Co. C, 1st Regt. Mass. Vol. Hy. Art., and was sworn into that company at Camp Kalorama, Washington, on August 6, 1861." And then that he "deserted" on May 28 or 29, 1862. Dr. Barton tells of the discovery of an affidavit in the War Department in which Lydia Bixby of Boston, on October 17, 1862, swore that "she was the widow of Cromwell Bixby and mother of Arthur Edward Bixby." Also that the boy would not reach the age of sixteen until November 22, that he had enlisted without her consent, and "had been subject to periodical fits of insanity from his youth." And that "an order for his discharge was issued." However, he was already a deserter. Dr. Barton thinks the mother did not tell the truth as to the boy's age. He identifies him as the "Edward Bixby, a native of Massachusetts," who died in Chicago on January 4, 1909.²⁶

In summary, then, two of the five sons of Mrs. Bixby

Abraham Lincoln & the Widow Bixby were killed in action, one was honorably discharged from the service, one may or may not have been a deserter and may or may not have died a prisoner of war, and the youngest deserted from the army, but apparently not "to the enemy." Not all these facts were known to the Adjutant-General's Office in Boston, or to the War Department in Washington, at the time the President wrote his letter to their mother. The beauty of the letter is not destroyed by the fact that its premises were wrong, nor is there any justification for assuming that Lincoln wrote it without reasonable assurances that the premises were true.

THE MISTAKES IN THE COUNT

For many years it has been widely known that Mrs. Bixby lost only two of her five soldier sons in the Civil War. What seems not to have been noticed heretofore is that only three days after Adjutant-General Schouler placed the President's letter in her hands the newspaper reading public of Boston learned that one of the sons was still alive. We have found in the *Boston Advertiser* of the morning of November 28, 1864, an item which other writers have not mentioned. The paragraph states that "George W. Bixby, of Co. B, 56th Regiment, was not killed, as has been supposed, before Petersburg, the 30th of July last, but was captured, unhurt, by the rebels. His mother, residing in this city, has mourned his death for four months." It would be decidedly interesting to know where the *Advertiser* got that information.

Let us con the calendar for a few minutes. We have noticed that on September 24, in his report to Gov-

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ernor Andrew, Schouler said that Mrs. Bixby had shown him the letters informing her of the loss of her sons "about ten days ago." That would have been more than ten weeks before the publication of the item in the *Advertiser*. The President's letter was dated November 21, or seven days before the *Advertiser's* notice. The Boston papers, as will be shown farther on, establish the fact that the letter was delivered to Mrs. Bixby on the morning of Friday, November 25, and that afternoon two Boston papers printed the text in full. Then, on the following Monday a third Boston daily disclosed the fact that one of the Bixby brothers was not dead! That must have been disconcerting for all the parties in interest. Furthermore, after another interval of only nineteen days, on December 17 another of the brothers was "honorably discharged" from the service "at Boston." Doubly disconcerting—and enough to explain the snap judgment that the whole Bixby story was unreliable.

"I HAVE BEEN SHOWN" SAID LINCOLN

The President's record in the case is clear. We know that Secretary Stanton took the Bixby documents from the War Department files on October 28. We have noted that Lincoln laid the foundation for his message in his opening sentence: "I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the adjutant-general of Massachusetts . . ." Twenty years ago the *Times* correspondent found that the officers of the War Department were preserving these records "with great care," considering them to "have been actually handled" by Abraham Lincoln, and to be

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“the ones to which his letter to Mrs. Bixby refers.” That obvious inference appears to us to be well warranted.

But there is an additional fact which surely is important. We can only wonder why it has not been discovered before. *Seven days after Stanton took the Bixby papers from the War Department files, Adjutant-General Schouler spent a half hour with President Lincoln in the White House.*

On October 18 Schouler had left Boston “to visit our Massachusetts regiments and batteries in the field,” having been “on duty at the State House almost without a day’s relief for two years and a half.” He visited many forts about Washington, went down to City Point, and made detailed notes of all he saw. On his return he “stood up for fifteen hours from Washington to Jersey City,” and arrived in Boston on “Nov. 8—Election Day.” During his absence of three weeks, he had traveled 1,800 miles, and his “expenses were just exactly . . . \$143.55.” The record of that tour proves him to have been a careful, devoted, and diligent public servant. That was no junket. He padded no expense accounts. One of the shortest passages in his report to Governor Andrew reads thus:

“Nov. 5.—Called upon the President, whom I had not seen since he was inaugurated. I had known him when in Congress, and when I lived in the West. He knew me, and I passed an agreeable half-hour with him. . . .”²⁷

No; we do not know what they talked about. Doubtless the man from Massachusetts told the President something about his trip, and he may have stated,

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what he included in his official report, that "there never were armies so well clothed, fed, and in better condition, than the Armies of the Potomac and the James." Probably Lincoln was reminded of a story or two. They may have mentioned old friends and incidents. The election, only three days away, must have been on the President's mind. He was very anxious to be returned for a second term. How would Massachusetts go? Was the case of the obscure widow who was supposed to have given five sons for the Union cause alluded to? Here was the man who had furnished what were understood to be the facts, and his papers were probably then somewhere about Lincoln's desk. No; we cannot prove that they interchanged a few questions and answers about "the Bixby boys." But we think they did talk about that "remarkable" record.

WHAT ABOUT MRS. BIXBY'S RECORD?

We have quoted in full that portion of Schouler's letter of September 24 in which he reminded Governor Andrew of the money he had advanced Mrs. Bixby two years before to enable her to go to Baltimore or Washington to see one of her sons who had been wounded at Antietam. He said that she made the journey and that "the boy recovered and joined his regiment again." Which of the five sons could that have been? Dr. Barton registered the opinion that Henry C. Bixby had enlisted but was still in Massachusetts at the time the battle was fought, and that Charles N. Bixby's regiment was in the battle, and that his name could not be found on the list of the wounded nor in the monthly reports of the regiment. He also wondered what Mrs.

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Bixby did with the Governor's forty dollars.²⁸ Mr. Cross found no evidence that any one of the Bixby boys was wounded in that battle.²⁹ As we have seen, the War Department records list Charles as having been mustered in on July 28, and Henry on August 13, 1862. The great battle took place on September 17. Henry's regiment, the 32nd Infantry, according to the official tabulations, had two enlisted men wounded in a subsidiary action a day or two after the seventeenth, and Charles' regiment, the 20th Infantry, was in the midst of the main battle, and sustained the loss of 124, of whom eighty-one were wounded enlisted men.³⁰ In the light of this evidence, Mrs. Bixby has been called "a chiseler." We do not deny the possibility, while pointing out that in the mournful days following the awful struggle at Antietam all sorts of wild rumors were in circulation. We simply remark, as an alternative possibility, that Mrs. Bixby may have been honestly mistaken.

But what of the "five letters from five different company commanders," each telling her of the death of a son? In his letter of September 24, Schouler informed the Governor that "about ten days" previously Mrs. Bixby had shown him the messages so described. We may adopt September 15 as the approximate date. We know that Charles had been killed early in May in the preceding year, and Oliver at the end of July, 1864, only six weeks before their mother climbed Beacon Hill to call on the adjutant-general. Henry at that time was a paroled prisoner of war and probably in the Parole Camp at Annapolis. George Way was a prisoner of war at Richmond. How recently their mother may have

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heard from these two sons we have no means of knowing. Nor can we be sure as to how much or how little she may have known about Edward, whom she had tried to detach from the army two years before, and who had deserted before the discharge order was issued. We now understand this to have been the situation when Mrs. Bixby came to the State House. She is entitled to the benefit of a fair share of the doubts which the records cast upon her plea, but the problem of the five letters from as many different company commanders remains unsolved.

COULD SCHOULER BE TRUSTED?

We are told also that Schouler should have seen, by examination of "the letters alleged to have been written by the five company commanders," that "they were frauds." And: "He should have known that the lists of dead and wounded were compiled by the War Department and not by individual commanders." However that may be, and we assume that the Department got the names and figures for its compilations from officers in the field, it is worthwhile to notice that army officers did sometimes communicate with the families of the men under their command. Otis Newhall's letter of September 21 to Governor Andrew contains this paragraph: "From the time he [the son] was mustered into service until he was wounded at Spottsylvania he was never absent from duty, never having spent an hour in hospital, but was, as I am informed by his captain, a good soldier throughout, taking part in most of the battles in which the grand old regiment was engaged."

It is our opinion that General Schouler made honest

Abraham Lincoln & the Widow Bixby

mistakes, and that he may have been maliciously deceived in this transaction with Lydia Bixby. But William Schouler was no fool, as has been asserted by some writers, nor did he "deceive the press," as has been charged in a connection which implies intentional deception. It seems strange that nobody has thought it worthwhile to find out who that man was. It surely is no digression to record a few facts about him. He is the "Friend Schooler" to whom Abraham Lincoln wrote from Washington in February, 1849, as one with whom his acquaintance "though short" had been "very cordial." The lone Whig congressman from Illinois wanted to enlist the aid of the editor of an influential Boston newspaper for his friend Edward D. Baker, or some other "Western aspirant," for a seat in the cabinet of the incoming President, Zachary Taylor. Doubtless Lincoln had met Schouler while on his stump-tour in the Bay State in 1848. For Schouler was not only a Whig, he was a "Conscience Whig," and he was at the time the editor of the *Boston Daily Atlas*. Lincoln had applied to him for political news a few weeks before starting for the Whig Convention at Worcester. Schouler was one of those who broke with Webster over his Seventh of March Speech. He is described by a professional observer as liking literature and public affairs and as interested also in military matters, and as "a public-spirited, energetic, and popular man." Born in Scotland in 1814, a vigilant politician, devoted to, and often consulted by, Governor Andrew, a man of wide experience, it is hard to understand how Mrs. Bixby could have fooled him with a bunch of faked letters. Somehow it seems curious that

The Origin of the Letter

he did not notice, and if he did notice one wonders why he was not disturbed by, "the shifty eyes" that have been attributed to that woman whom he went out of the way to aid. It was part of his business to be on guard. He administered his department well. He is credited with having stirred the commonwealth to prepare for the impending war by his annual report of December 31, 1860, and with having so skilfully handled the situation at the time of the draft riots in 1863 in New York as to prevent such disorders in Boston. The last official act of John A. Andrew as governor was to issue a formal "order" recording his gratitude for the "constancy, devotion, ability, and success," with which the adjutant-general had done his work.³¹ The archives expert, Mr. Fred W. Cross, left a written memorandum that "it is reasonable to assume that when Mrs. Bixby made her visit to the office on September 15, 1864, she may have honestly believed that all her sons were dead." But he could not explain the "five letters from five company commanders. And General Schouler declared that the mother exhibited such letters." Whatever clues may once have existed for the unriddling of this puzzle seem now to have vanished without trace.

A GENEALOGIST'S VIEW

The Bixby genealogists stand by General Schouler. "The fact that Schouler himself saw the letters from company commanders affirming the death of each of the five sons of Mrs. Bixby—and it is not to be doubted that he would have been able to judge of their authenticity—shows conclusively that Mrs. Bixby had every reason to suppose at the time she called on Gen-

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eral Schouler, early in September, 1864, that none of her sons were living.”³² For that carefully composed sentence Willard G. Bixby and Eben Putnam were responsible. We infer that it was written by Mr. Putnam and approved by Mr. Bixby. The writer had his mind focussed upon the most mystifying phase of the problem. The adjutant-general saw certain papers. On request from Washington he sent for Mrs. Bixby for more detailed information. He sent back to the War Department what purported to be the essential facts about the Bixby brothers. Where did he get them? Could Mrs. Bixby have invented them? What motive could General Schouler have had for any misrepresentation? Ten years after the publication of the genealogy, Mr. Putnam sent us a letter in which he indicated that he well understood the nature of the puzzle. From his home in Wellesley, on August 10, 1925, he wrote about the care with which his work had been done. The letter contained this provocative statement: “Mrs. Bixby showed Schouler letters from commanders of companies notifying her of the death of men she presumed were her sons. As a matter of fact there were two families concerned. . . . The various Bixby families contributed a large number of men to the Union armies, and there are several instances of several sons in various families having served.”³³

Is it possible that this is the key for the solution of the mystery? We know of no way to demonstrate it. We leave it as an improbable possibility.

HER “SHIFTY EYES”

Now we must consider a distinctly unpleasant matter, dealing with the character of Mrs. Bixby, and

The Origin of the Letter

suggesting the possibility that she might have forged the five letters, or caused them to be fabricated. It is hard to believe that the adjutant-general could have been taken in by any crude forgery, and Mrs. Bixby did not have the education for the production of a convincing fake. If she knowingly presented fraudulent documents somebody must have helped her to manufacture them.

The definite and black charge which must go into our record is contained in an account of an incident which is said to have occurred in wartime, while one of the sons was at home with his mother on leave. This story is included in a genealogy of the Cabot family, in the form of a quotation from the recollections of Mrs. Andrew C. Wheelwright, who had been Miss Sarah Cabot. She recalled that she had given work to "a Mrs. Bixby, who had been recommended . . . by Mrs. Charles Paine, as being very deserving. . . . She was a stout woman, more or less motherly looking, but with shifty eyes," whom "we called 'Mother Bixby.'" She "claimed to have five sons in the army." Miss Cabot had heard "there were means of getting supplies to Libby Prison." Mrs. Bixby told her of the son then at home, and that "if I would come to her house in Albany Street or Essex Street—I forget which—she would tell me more about" how to send her packages to Richmond. The call was made. Miss Cabot "did not like the looks of things at all, and the woman was very evasive." She "said her son was not there." Arrangements were made for her to send him to the Albany railroad station "at a certain time." There "a very ill-looking man . . . came towards me. He began with some familiarity, but I soon put a stop to him, finding I could get no in-

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formation from him, and sent him off. Soon after this I received a very distressed letter from Mrs. Paine, saying that the police, on finding that we were helping this woman, had told her that she kept a house of ill-fame and was perfectly untrustworthy and as bad as she could be. We found that it was a convenient story for her to tell that she had five sons in the war, but that probably not more than two were her sons." And Mrs. Wheelwright concludes: "To think that these [Lincoln's] precious words should have been sent to this worthless woman, and that such blunders should have been made in the War Department!"³⁴

We present the story as Mrs. Wheelwright recorded it. It is, of course, the kind of testimony for which one would wish to have corroborative evidence. It is passing strange that such a woman as Mrs. Bixby is represented to have been, should have invited any such person as Miss Cabot to her house, and that she should have sent a "very ill-looking" and bold man to interview her. On what probability, we wonder, is the statement made that only two of the "sons" were hers. Mrs. Bixby is entered in the Boston directories as a nurse, or a widow, but no Albany or Essex Street address is given in the war years. She did live in that neighborhood, however.

The hard-pressed woman was residing at 10 Tyler Place, according to the Boston Directory, in 1861, and with her were three of her sons, Charles, Edward, and Henry, all listed as "bootheelers." From that year until her death no member of her family is listed as living with her. In 1862 the directory placed her at 20 Kneeland Street. Her name does not appear at all in the city's list

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for the following year, but a pension document gives her address as 14 Tyler Street. She is back in the directory for 1864, at 140 Hudson Street, but that is the year also when General Schouler found her in Dover Street Place. There is no trace of her in 1865. For two years we then find her at 25 Albany Street. After that the directories for four years contain no trace of her, but she reappears in 1872 at 54 Pleasant Street, where she remained through 1875, her longest period of residence in any one place. She is listed in 1876 and 1877 at 76 Carver Street, and in 1878 at 1 Mahan Place. It is a depressing but not necessarily a suspicious record.

Dr. Barton pronounces the family to have been "landless, thriftless, . . . erratic," and says that some of the boys were "too fond of drink."³⁵ The sons learned the shoemaker's trade, and the occupation helps one to trace them in the city directories. A staff correspondent of *The Boston Herald*, on August 11, 1925, had an interview in print with a granddaughter of Mrs. Bixby. She was represented therein as a woman of "firm convictions," who had "great sympathy for the South" in the war, an attitude which "perhaps" could be attributed to the loss of her sons, and who had "little good to say of President Lincoln." A grandson on August 9 expressed the opinion that Mrs. Bixby "was not the type of woman who would realize the value of such a letter" as Lincoln sent her.

Good newspapers were published in Boston during the Civil War. Their reporters knew the town well. A few of them, in regular course, would "contact" the police. What attitude did the press take toward the

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Widow Bixby? In the *Traveller* of November 21, 1864, and in other papers, Adjutant-General Schouler had an appeal for contributions to enable the families of the soldiers at the front to enjoy "good New England Thanksgiving dinners." He included a sentence in behalf of Mrs. Bixby. "I can point out," he said, "where in one of the most wealthy and prosperous Wards of this city a poor but most worthy widow lady can be found, who sent five sons into this war, all the children she had, every one of whom has fallen nobly in battle. . . ." Five days later the *Traveller* recorded that in response to this appeal "a considerable amount of money was received for soldiers' families, and some was sent especially for the lady to whom allusion was made. General Schouler visited her and left the money, and called yesterday to see that she had everything comfortable for Thanksgiving." The names and supposed war records of her sons were appended. General Schouler, then, had called upon her twice. Did he see anything of a suspicious character about the house? In the several notices in the press about Mrs. Bixby and the letter Lincoln wrote her there is nothing to be read between the lines suggestive of anything disreputable in her life. Schouler was in error in referring to the five sons as "all the children she had." There were three daughters and at least one other son. The *Transcript* on November 25 alluded to her "six sons enlisted in the Union Army" and stated that the "sixth is now at the U. S. Hospital at Readville." A similar reference to an unnamed son may be found in the *Traveller's* article of November 26. Plausible and probable is the theory that this "sixth son" was Henry Cromwell Bixby, who

TRANSCRIPT, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 1864.

TWO DAYS LATER FROM EUROPE.

Arrival of the Asia.

THANKSGIVING DAY was never more generally observed in this vicinity than it was yesterday. The weather was very favorable for those who visited neighboring States to enjoy the festival among their kindred. The trains of Wednesday were heavily laden with old and young, homeward bound, and all the avenues of travel were thronged, both day and night. The improved aspect of public

The soldiers in the hospitals, and hospitals in this vicinity highly relished the thanksgiving luxuries provided for them. The officers state that the troops are much gratified at the bountiful remembrances they have received from the public.

LETTER FROM PRESIDENT LINCOLN. Mrs. Bixby—a lady in the southern portion of this city, whose case has excited much sympathy—had six sons enlisted in the Union army, five of whom have been killed in battle, and the sixth is now at the U. S. Hospital at Readville. Being in indigent circumstances, she has received assistance from some of the churches and Christian women of Boston. Her lonely abode was made cheerful this morning by the receipt of the following letter from President Lincoln:

EXECUTIVE MANSION,
WASHINGTON, Nov. 21, 1864.

Dear Madam,—I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts, that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle.

I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save.

I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours, to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of Freedom.

Yours, very sincerely and respectfully,
Mrs. BIXBY. A. LINCOLN.

Facsimile of the first publication of the Bixby Letter in the Boston Transcript, on the day of its delivery to Mrs. Bixby.

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was discharged from the service a few days later "at Boston"; Readville was only a few miles from the city. However, a few years ago we received a carefully written letter from a granddaughter of Cromwell and Lydia Bixby, in which she affirmed that "as a matter of actual fact, six sons went to war." We leave the question open as to whether the sixth son did enter the service. The *Transcript* pictured Mrs. Bixby as "in indigent circumstances," and said: "she has received assistance from some of the churches and Christian women of Boston." What did they think of the "shifty eyes" and what did they notice about her household?

We have no wish to indulge in special pleading, and we frankly admit our inability to explain various things in this "case." We go only so far as to point out a few circumstances that tend somewhat to favor this widowed mother. She was having a desperate struggle to get along. The papers in the Bureau contain her application for a pension, dated May 21, 1863, which would be only eighteen days after the death of Charles N. Bixby at Fredericksburg. She seems to have had no difficulty in obtaining affidavits. One man for whom this son had worked as a shoemaker affirmed that his former employee had given "his mother \$5 to \$6 out of the \$9 he drew each week for two years." The greater part of his earnings at his trade went to his mother.³⁶ More in detail, another of Mrs. Bixby's friends, a woman aged forty-two years, avowed herself to be well acquainted with her, having "lived in the same house for about a year before" her son "went to the war." She testified that "they occupied some six rooms in the house all of which were paid for" by the

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son, "who also purchased fuel and provisions with his own money for the support of his mother." Also, said this witness, "when he went to the war he bought and gave to his mother sufficient groceries for six months." A third witness was the lessee of the house in which Charles N. Bixby installed his mother.

It is right to mention the fact that Mrs. Wheelwright's narrative of events long past is drawn upon quite freely as a sound authority for family affairs by the compiler of the Cabot genealogy. It is described as "a memoir written for her daughter," and several times is alluded to as her "reminiscences." Naturally the question of dates arises. We learn that Miss Sarah Cabot was born in 1835, that she married Andrew Cunningham Wheelwright in 1876, and died in 1917. The daughter was born in 1878. The date of the writing of the "memoir" we have not been able to ascertain.

In the Archives and Records Division of the Department of State on Beacon Hill there is a record showing that Mrs. Lydia Bixby, "maiden name Parker, widow of Cromwell Bixby, born in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, the daughter of Andrew and Lydia Parker, the father having been born in England, had died, after an illness of two months, at the Massachusetts Hospital, at the age of 77, on October 27, 1878." The burial place is noted as Mount Hope Cemetery, and the name and address of the undertaker are recorded. The Boston Directory for 1879 gives the same date for her death. Her card in the Administration Building at Mount Hope carries the same age and death date, and the funeral date is October 29.

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She was not buried, as sometimes has been said, in the Potter's Field. An old cemetery record book lists her as the owner of two graves in the Maple Grove section. We have visited these graves. They are not plots of ground but single graves, and, like others in the section, are marked by small slate stones, each bearing a number. The records in the Administration Building provide the names that match the numbers. Mrs. Bixby's card reads: "Lydia Bixby—Grave 423—Maple Grove." The attendant in charge of the building had never heard of Abraham Lincoln's letter to the widow who had lost five sons in the war! For each of these graves Mrs. Bixby paid ten dollars. In Grave 424 was buried in 1870 a grandson of Mrs. Bixby. This would be a son of the Oliver C. Bixby who was killed at Petersburg. At that time the son was sixteen years of age.

BUT "LINCOLN'S LETTER IS LOST"

NOBODY disputes the authenticity of President Lincoln's letter to Mrs. Bixby, in spite of the discovery that she had lost only two instead of all five of her soldier sons, and in the face also of the curious fact that since the day General Schouler placed the letter in her hands it has been seen by nobody who left any record of having examined it. Many unrelenting searchers have hunted for it. Public and private libraries, war offices and state houses, archives and diaries, have been explored, in vain. Mr. Barbee is right in saying that "it may, with the greatest confidence, be stated, that the original of the Bixby letter is lost."

The contents of that original are not lost, however. For this we are indebted to the newspapers of Boston. On Friday, November 25, *The Evening Transcript* published the letter, with the prefatory remarks which we have already quoted: "Mrs. Bixby,—a lady in the southern portion of this city whose case has excited much sympathy—had six sons enlisted in the Union army, five of whom have been killed in battle, and the sixth is now at the U. S. Hospital at Readville. Being in indigent circumstances, she has received assistance

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from some of the churches and Christian women of Boston. *Her lonely abode was made cheerful this morning by the receipt of the following letter from President Lincoln*"—and there, in its first edition of that afternoon, the *Transcript* recorded for all time the famous message. We italicize the sentence above because it determines the date of the delivery of the letter to Mrs. Bixby. Mr. Wakefield is in error in stating that this publication occurred on the day after the letter was handed to her. Either General Schouler sent word to the office of the *Transcript* or a reporter had called at his office on "The Hill," and a copy had come in one way or the other into the possession of the paper. That same afternoon, in its "second edition," the *Traveller* printed the letter, with an extended account of the circumstances and the records of the five sons, and on the next afternoon that paper reprinted the same account as from "yesterday's second edition." On that day also *The Boston Journal* carried the letter, and in New York the *Tribune* displayed the letter on its first page. Although the *United States Army and Navy Journal* often has been credited with its first publication, the letter did not appear in that periodical until December 3, the Saturday of the following week.

Dr. Barton, writing in 1926, and Mr. Wakefield, in 1938, agree that it "seems strange" and "doubly remarkable" that this letter of condolence was not included in any early collection of Lincoln's writings. They refer to the Reverend Edward Everett Hale's small volume which he named *The President's Words*, and to a larger compilation, edited perhaps by Francis

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Lieber, called *The Martyr's Monument*, both published in 1865. Mr. Wakefield says also that "apparently the first publication in book form is in J. G. Holland's *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, and assigns 1865 as the date of that work. It seems to us that an examination of *The President's Words* and *The Martyr's Monument* will dissipate the idea that there is anything "strange" in the omission of this letter from those volumes. Dr. Hale's subtitle is *A Selection of Passages from the Speeches, Addresses and Letters of Lincoln*. In the main the book is a collection of short passages, dealing with "Political Systems," "Slavery and Anti-Slavery," "Faith in God and in the People," and "Internal Improvements," ending with a few longer papers, among them the Second Inaugural, and some passages illustrative of his personal traits. There are only four or five letters in the book and all these deal with public matters. *The Martyr's Monument* is a compilation of state papers, letters to public men concerning the Administration's statecraft and the strategy of the Union armies, messages, proclamations, orders and suggestions to military men, and replies to delegations. About two scores of letters are here, addressed to individuals and groups, and not one is personal in the sense in which the Ellsworth and the Bixby letters are personal. To make the record complete, we add that three "Lives" of Lincoln were copyrighted and published in 1865, all of which contain the letter to Mrs. Bixby—that by Frank Crosby, with a preface dated in June of that year; another by Joseph H. Barrett, the preface of which is dated July 20, 1865; and a third by Henry J. Raymond, with an undated preface.

But "Lincoln's Letter Is Lost"

As to Holland's *Life*, the preface date is November, 1865, and the book was copyrighted in that year, but it was published in 1866. I. N. Arnold copyrighted and published in 1866 his *History of Abraham Lincoln*, and included our letter therein.³⁷ All these works were widely circulated and Holland's was a best seller.

Another book, very different in character and also of very early publication, which was popular in its day, carried the letter as a prefatory item, following the table of contents. This was Lydia Minturn Post's *Soldiers' Letters from Camp, Battle-Field and Prison*, which was published in aid of the Sanitary Commission. The volume contains 223 letters, covering the four years of the Civil War and ending with the surrender of Lee and the slaying of the President. We cannot be certain of its place in the order of publication, for, like the three biographies named above, it was copyrighted and published in 1865. The brief foreword is not dated. Our letter is presented in neat Spencerian script. The signature has only the initial for the first name, and Mrs. Bixby's name is below the message. At the top "Executive Mansion, Washington," with the date, are in type. The letter is divided into three paragraphs. It would seem that the source was the newspapers, as all the "points" in the original *Transcript* publication are present.

What became of the letter? We do not know, nor do we know of anybody who does know. The most reasonable theory is that expressed by Mrs. Bixby's grandson, a son of Oliver Cromwell Bixby, who told the *Boston Herald* in 1925 that "Grandmother Bixby, from what I have heard of her, was not a woman who

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would appreciate the value of such a letter and take proper care of it. . . . Had she sold it, or given it away, I think I would have heard of it: That is why I doubt if the letter still exists. . . . My own opinion is that it has been destroyed." With that opinion practically all Lincoln authorities agree.

“WE HAVE SEEN THE LETTER IN
LINCOLN’S SCRIPT”

Yet we are face to face with the paradoxical fact that alleged facsimiles of this letter are found on the walls of homes and offices, in books and magazines, everywhere and in uncountable numbers. These, assumed to be in the script of the Martyr President, have brought hope and comfort to multitudes of sorrowing mothers and fathers, and the letter in plain and cold type has meant even more to many who know the story of its loss.

Upon these “facsimiles” it seems unnecessary to spend much time. The accepted story is told by Dr. Barton and in similar terms by Mr. Wakefield. Almost twenty-seven years after the vanishing of the original, a dealer in prints and pictures in New York City, one Michael F. Tobin, applied, on April 25, 1891, for a copyright of an engraving which he called “Lincoln’s Letter.” He sold copies of this “engraving” at two dollars each. Not long thereafter a rival entered the field. Over “on Fourteenth Street, east of Fourth Avenue,” the proprietor of a big collection of freaks, fakes, and miscellaneous curiosities known as Huber’s Museum also offered copies of the “original” letter for sale, and at half the price of the earlier vendor. Neither

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made any trouble for the other. They were hardly real rivals, for they probably dealt with entirely different classes of patrons. Neither dealer produced the "original" from which his copies were made. These copies were prepared by the zinc etching process, we are told. Tobin's application for a copyright was a model of business brevity. He offered no explanations. What is perplexing, he applied for and obtained in 1904, another copyright on the same "engraving"—and his first copyright had not run half its course. The Library of Congress has not been able to find the copies which Tobin was required by law to file in order to obtain his registration.³⁸ How long Tobin and Huber continued this business we do not know.

We can be positive about one thing—had either of them possessed that original Lincoln Letter, or had he known where it was, he would have advertised his great find all over the country, and he would have taken measures to drive the other man out of business. Nor do we know who did the forging. To have gone to law over these "facsimiles" might have brought unpleasant consequences. In talking with us about these matters Dr. Barton made much of the way Lincoln would bring an "e" down to the line, and dwelt upon the difference between Lincoln's practice and the final "e" in the word "beguile" in the two "facsimiles." There are differences between the printed text of the letter as first published and these supposititious copies of the script. That eminent authority, Dr. Victor H. Paltsits, who for many years was in charge of the Manuscripts Department of the New York Public Library, declared in 1925 that the "many facsimiles extant" could not

Executive Mansion
Washington, Nov 21, 1864

To Mrs Bixby, Boston, Mass,

Dear Madam.

I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn promise that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully

A. Lincoln

An alleged facsimile of the Bixby Letter for
which Michael F. Tobin obtained a
copyright in 1901.

all have been made from the same original, because they "showed marked differences in the formation of the letters."³⁹ We provide the means for any curious or studious reader to make his own examination of these "documents" by placing them side by side on a folded sheet, together with a third copy which has interesting associations. This is a photograph of an alleged original, which Mr. Judd Stewart, a member of the quintette

Executive Mansion
Washington, Nov 21, 1864

To Mrs Bisby, Boston, Mass,

Dear Madam.

I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously in the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully

A. Lincoln

The "facsimile" exhibited in the Huber Museum.

of collectors known as "the big five," may once have owned. Beyond that its history has not been traced. It is badly stained and has been carelessly folded.

The situation might have been made to order for a clever purveyor of literary goldbricks. An original letter, written by a man whom the nation loved, upon a theme which had vibrated the chords of memory in millions of minds and touched the hearts of mothers and fathers all over the land, had not been seen for more than a quarter of a century. Plenty of examples

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of Lincoln's script were readily available. It would be interesting to know what the forger's fee was and how many copies the dealers sold. A facile pen and an easy conscience can be bought almost anywhere when a chance for profit is in sight. Barnum's frank admission that he fooled a public that liked to be fooled is still pertinent. We are living in a realistic age amidst a great lot of gullible people. It required no great amount of ingenuity to put over these "facsimiles." The penman or penmen who did the job may or may not have fooled Tobin and Huber. One supposes such dealers would want to be "shown."

WAS COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY FOOLED?

What may seem the most mystifying of all these puzzles is suggested by a news item in the *New York Tribune* of February 12, 1909, containing a short account of a collection of Lincoln manuscripts on view in that Lincoln centenary month at Columbia University, in which this paragraph is found:

"The Bixby letter, with edges frayed and discolored, reposes in a glass case near the Jefferson letter written by Lincoln to Henry S. Pierce and others."

The solution of this riddle is simple, as will presently appear. The exhibition covered most of the month of February. No complete list of the exhibits was prepared, although a pamphlet was printed dealing with the large collection of medals placed on display. Among the letters and documents shown, in addition to the "Bixby letter" and the 1859 Jefferson day letter to

But "Lincoln's Letter Is Lost"

Henry L. Pierce, were Lincoln's verses about a bear hunt, letters concerning the Cabinet crisis of 1864, Lincoln's estimate of the electoral vote for that year, documents described only as the Gettysburg Address and the Emancipation Proclamation, and "a letter written by John Hay and signed by President Lincoln." There were paintings and sculptures also, and the life mask by Leonard Volk. Among the collectors represented were Major William H. Lambert, Judd Stewart, C. W. McLellan, Guy DuVal, Jesse Weik, and Robert T. Lincoln; the collection of medallic Lincolniana was loaned by Robert Hewitt.⁴⁰

Our theory about this "Bixby letter" is that the parties in charge of the exhibition placed in the case what the public assumed to be the original but what in fact was a "facsimile." The *Tribune's* item would tend to mislead the public; although it did not say outright that the visitor was looking upon the actual letter penned by Lincoln. The sentence contained no qualifying statement and was sure to produce the impression that the paper "with edges frayed and discolored" was the real thing and not some kind of copy. There was no label or explanatory statement. The *Tribune's* allusion to the condition of the document exactly fits the description of the Huber "facsimile" which may be found in the letters of those who saw it when it was on display in the Museum. The projectors of the Columbia exhibit heard that "the original" was at Huber's, and naturally asked permission to borrow it for the centenary celebration. They must have examined it with care when it was delivered to them, and the fact that they put it in the case without comment is enough to justify

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the inference that they understood the character of the paper, but felt themselves to be under obligation to recognize the courtesy of the owner by including it in their display.

Well—"that may be so, but of course it's all guess-work." No; it is not simply a guess. We do allude to it in the preceding paragraph as "our theory," but we would not venture to state it at all unless we had seen documents which guarantee it to be a correct exposition of the essential facts.

WHAT NICOLAY AND HAY DID

Robert T. Lincoln entrusted to John G. Nicolay and John Hay, his father's secretaries and biographers, the compilation and publication of the Civil War President's *Complete Works*. They admitted the letter to the Boston widow to their collection. Where did they get it? Their edition of Lincoln's works was published in 1894. By that time the Tobin and Huber "facsimiles" had been before the public for about three years. They must have known of the existence of these "copies." For years they had been living in a Lincoln atmosphere. Their biography had run nearly four years in *The Century Magazine*, ending in February, 1890, and its book publication, in ten volumes, followed in the same year. Robert T. Lincoln's formal proposal that they should edit and give to the world "the speeches, letters, state papers, and miscellaneous writings" of his father was dated May 30, 1893. The project must have been discussed long before that time. It would be strange, indeed, if they knew nothing of the "facsimiles" which Tobin and Huber were selling.

But "Lincoln's Letter Is Lost"

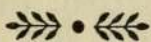
Yet they did not follow either the newspapers or the industrious purveyors in New York in the arrangement of the letter. In the *Boston Evening Transcript* the signature is "A. Lincoln," and the name "Mrs. Bixby" is at the foot. Tobin and Huber both have the same signature, but the widow's name is at the top. Nicolay and Hay placed her name at the top, but the signature is "Abraham Lincoln." Again in 1905, in the expanded Gettysburg edition of the works, the signature stands as "Abraham Lincoln," but the "cross line" above the letter probably caused the publishing company to feel that the name of the addressee could be omitted in the line just below that "head." And then! in the next volume of the Gettysburg edition a "facsimile" of the letter is inserted, with the name above the short signature, with a note below which reads: "Facsimile of the Original Manuscript on Exhibition at Huber's Museum in New York City." Let it be remembered that Nicolay died in 1901, and Hay on the first day of July, 1905. For many months Hay had been aware of a physical decline which was compelling him to lighten his labors in whatever way he could. In his preface the publisher of the Gettysburg edition took pains to explain that since 1894 "a multitude of Lincoln collectors" had "brought to light a large amount of manuscript material . . ." and that "the aim" had been "to collect this material, add it to the work of the two great biographers, and so make a complete and definitive edition." The notes were "mostly new," but those for which Nicolay and Hay "remain responsible are in this edition signed with their initials."⁴¹

It is plain that neither Hay nor Nicolay had much,

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if anything, to do with the preparation of this edition. The 1894 copyright would cover the matter in the first edition, and the 1905 copyright, in the name of the publisher, protected the new material. Neither of the biographers was responsible for the use of the Huber "facsimile." Indeed, John Hay, as we shall see, once pronounced it a forgery.

This does not explain, however, the inclusion of the Bixby letter in the Nicolay and Hay edition of 1894. Its authenticity they did not doubt. How could they in the face of its publication on the day of its delivery? We offer, simply as a more or less plausible surmise, although we cannot demonstrate its correctness, that they kept a copy of the letter, with the salutation at the top and the formal signature, in recognition of the fact that it was no ordinary communication. The occasion was without parallel. The President adopted the only proper manner. He wrote as the representative of the nation, the Commander-in-Chief of the Union army. He signed the message with a most unusual assurance of respect and sincerity—not "Yours very truly," or "Yours as ever," or "Your sincere friend," but "Yours very sincerely and respectfully," and he appended the ceremonious signature with which he had signed the Emancipation Proclamation—"Abraham Lincoln."



DID LINCOLN WRITE THE LETTER?

THOSE who deny Lincoln's authorship of the Bixby letter offer many arguments in support of their position—most of them easy to answer, none of them decisive.

Mr. Wakefield, among others, cites as an item of internal evidence, admittedly not conclusive, the heading at the top of the "facsimiles." All these are in longhand, a point which "serves to throw considerable doubt on the authenticity" of these copies.⁴² Discussion of this topic serves no useful purpose. If the forger could have put his hand on Executive Mansion stationery, he might have produced a document that would have inspired more confidence, and he might have collected a higher price for his product, whatever amount he may have obtained. For all we know the President may have written the letter on an official letter sheet.

However, he did not always use official paper. He tended to matters often very divergent in nature, ranging from simple favors to significant decisions of state, under headings written in his own longhand. The following note to an autograph seeker, undeniably genuine, was done in such a manner:

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“Executive Mansion

Washington, Feb. 20, 1865.

Miss Ella Steele

With pleasure I send the autograph.

Yours truly

A. Lincoln”

Another example appears in a formal document of the highest importance, signed by the President with his given name in full.⁴⁴

“Executive Mansion

Washington D. C. Dec. 6, 1864

To the Senate of the United States

I nominate Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, to be Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States vice Roger B. Taney, deceased.

Abraham Lincoln”

We already have shown that the letter to Miss Fanny McCullough is not “the only letter of condolence which can be definitely attributed to Lincoln.” Mr. Wakefield considers it to be “the most tender and helpful letter of condolence” he has ever read.⁴⁵ Mr. Barbee declares that “it shows the real Lincoln, and it is so superior to the Bixby letter that there is hardly any comparison,” and very properly, he adds: “But of this every one must judge for himself.”⁴⁶

Lincolnians have done just that, and not one in a thousand would agree with his judgment. This volume contains the full text of the letter to the parents of Ellsworth, of the letter to Miss McCullough, and of the Bixby letter. The “real Lincoln” is in all three of them.

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One is a letter to a young woman with whom and her family he had been on friendly terms in Illinois. Another is addressed to a "Father and Mother" whom he may never have seen. The phrasing is more formal, but the letter is suffused with warm feeling. Both these letters are personal in character. The Bixby letter belongs in an entirely different classification. The President of the United States, as the spokesman for the nation, addresses a mother who is understood to have given the lives of five sons for the cause of free-

Executive Mansion

Washington D. C. Dec. 6. 1864

To the Senate of the United States

*I nominate Salmon P. Chase
of Ohio, to be Chief Justice of the Supreme
Court of the United States, vice Roger B. Tan-
ney, deceased.*

Abraham Lincoln

*Facsimile of the President's nomination of
S. P. Chase for Chief Justice of the
United States, with "Executive
Mansion" in long hand.*

dom. An intimate style would obviously have been unsuitable for such a message. The same sweep of vision and beauty of style which characterize the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural are in this short letter. That is why it is admired and cherished by

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people of every class in this country and in many other
lands.

LINCOLN "WROTE VERY FEW LETTERS"

Many guesses and fully as many flat assertions have been founded upon a passage in the important letter written in Paris in 1866 by John Hay to William H. Herndon, who then was hard at work collecting information for his biography of his longtime law partner. Hay said of Lincoln:

"He wrote very few letters. He did not read one in fifty that he received. At first we tried to bring them to his notice, but at last he gave the whole thing over to me, and signed without reading them the letters I wrote in his name. He wrote perhaps half a dozen a week himself—not more. . . . I opened and read the letters, answered them, looked over the newspapers, supervised the clerks who kept the records and in Nicolay's absence did his work also. . . ." ⁴⁷

This is a statement for careful consideration. It has been made to mean what it does not say. Mr. Wakefield, by a curious inadvertence, insists that we must "accept" this "evidence that Hay wrote letters in Lincoln's name and handwriting," ⁴⁸ whereas all he said was that he wrote letters in Lincoln's name and the President signed them, without a syllable about the handwriting. Assuming that the assistant private secretary had been authorized to write letters in the name of the President, why, if he could and did simulate Lincoln's handwriting, should he not also imitate his signature, instead of carrying the letters to the President for him to sign "without reading"? It is enormously easier to imitate a signature than to write a letter in another man's hand.

How many letters Lincoln wrote, how many John

Did Lincoln Write the Letter?

Hay "wrote in his name," how many Senior Secretary Nicolay wrote under his direction, nobody knows. Carl Sandburg's count attributes to Lincoln 216 letters in 1861, 211 in 1862, 543 in 1863, 536 in 1864.⁴⁹ The average would be more than seven a week. The total would cover all the important letters that we know about and many not of special significance. That careful Lincoln authority, William H. Townsend, also has done some counting. A few years ago he examined all the collections of Lincoln letters and counted those for the four Novembers of the Presidential years. He excluded telegrams and state papers, and made an allowance for future discoveries. He found that there would remain no more letters than Hay says Lincoln himself wrote. A count of the Aprils of those years ended with the same conclusion, that Hay's average would amply cover all the real Lincoln letters in the years that Hay served him. One who examines the available sources is almost sure to make up his mind that no argument bearing on the authenticity of the Bixby letter can fairly be based on what his former secretary wrote in 1866, and that Mr. Townsend's opinion is sound—that "all Hay's statement to Herndon can possibly mean is that in many routine, inconsequential, unimportant matters, Hay wrote letters for Lincoln in Hay's own distinctive, undisguised handwriting to which Lincoln affixed his own signature."⁵⁰

HOW WERE LINCOLN'S LETTERS SIGNED?

A search for letters written for the President and signed with the Secretary's own name is a rewarding exercise. We offer two examples. One is addressed to

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that eminent citizen of Boston, who was rendering fine service as a civilian for the cause of the Union, John Murray Forbes.⁵¹

*“Executive Mansion,
Washington, September 12, 1863.*

My dear Sir,—

The President directs me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter transmitted by Mr. Sumner, and to express to you his sincere thanks for the suggestions it contains, as well as for the kind terms in which you have spoken of himself. I have the honor to be very truly,

Your obedient servant,

John Hay,

Private Secretary.”

This is an excellent specimen of correct secretarial practice. Our other example, very different in kind, and relating not to a routine matter but to an extraordinary incident, is taken from one of the ponderous volumes of the *Official Records*. The President had taken Horace Greeley at his word, and was sending that erratic genius to Niagara to bring a group of Confederate emissaries to Washington. John Hay, entrusted with the arrangements for Greeley to start on that foolish and fruitless trip, telegraphed the White House from New York City that the famous editor feared the Lincoln letter brought by the secretary would not protect the Southerners from arrest. He wanted “an absolute safe-conduct” for them. In an hour the reply came. Lincoln authorized Hay to write the safe-conduct. The secretary, in his capacity as an

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army officer, wrote that "The President of the United States directs that the four persons . . . shall have safe-conduct in company with the Hon. Horace Greeley," and he ended thus, in strict documentary style: "By order of the President: John Hay, Major and assistant Adjutant-General."⁵²

LINCOLN'S OTHER SECRETARIES

We now raise the question if John Hay did in fact open and read and answer the President's letters. Good evidence exists that the statement in the letter to Herndon ought not to be taken in any comprehensive sense, although as written it would seem to have been intended as a definite finality. We have two witnesses whose testimony contravenes what Hay said. How it happens that nobody has taken into account the presence in the White House of an additional secretary during all but about four months of Lincoln's occupancy we do not attempt to explain. All the same William O. Stoddard served as "mailbag secretary" from July, 1861, "to the time for the fall of the leaves in the year 1864,"⁵³ and Edward D. Neill served in a similar capacity from some time "early in 1864" until a few days after the death of the President.⁵⁴

Stoddard had been an Illinois editor and a campaigner for Lincoln in 1860. He was appointed as a secretary for the signing of land patents, and, after serving with the President's permission for three months with a volunteer regiment, he became an assistant private secretary. For the nature of his work there are three sources of information, his biography of Lincoln published in 1884 which contains a few illumi-

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nating lines, his *Inside the White House in War Times* (1890) with many pertinent references, and a couple of *Atlantic Monthly* articles in 1925, in which as an old man, aided by his son, he retold some of the incidents he had recorded many years before. After making all allowances for slips of memory there remains an abundance of valuable information. About 3 per cent of the Executive Mansion mail was "at some time seen by the President . . . A careful estimate shows that of all the letters sent by mail to Mr. Lincoln, at this time [1862], he saw and read, at the time of their arrival, about *one in a hundred*; less rather than more." ⁵⁵

In his account of life in the White House, "Stod" as Lincoln called him, has scores of allusions to Lincoln's correspondence. The President's messenger lugs in a big sack of mail, and "what a pile it makes, as he pours it out upon the table!" Stoddard sorts the pile. These are applications for jobs—they "must be examined with care, and some of them must be briefed before they are referred to the departments and bureaus . . . We will not show any of them to Mr. Lincoln at present." Another lot are "pardon papers." "This desk has the custody of them," although their "proper place" might be the War Department. All will go there in time, "but the President wishes them where he can lay his hands upon them, and every batch of papers and petitions must be in order for him when he calls for it." And here are the nuisance letters, threats and warnings, the devilish letters signed in "blood" by "The Angel Gabriel," and the volumes of advice sent "through a

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medium by the spirits” of Washington, Franklin, Adams, Jefferson, *et al.*

One gem is from a man—in Illinois!—who has invented a cross-eyed gun, with two barrels set at an angle; he wants a regiment of cross-eyed men to use them. The Peninsula campaign is “slow.” “Never before did such letters of wild reproach come pouring through the mails.” So always when things go wrong. Halleck is “a pedantic fool.” Grant is “a blundering drunkard.” Pope is “a windmill.” “Stod’s” cheeks “burn” as he chucks such letters into “wickerwork oblivion.”

One night he works over the mail until three in the morning, and thus the world learns of the President’s vigil after the terrible news from Chancellorsville. Along in 1864 Stoddard was laid off for a time by an attack of typhoid. On his return he finds the mail is only “a third as large as it used to be.” He “reckons that Hay or somebody” had cared for it. “Stod” copied various important documents for Lincoln, and the President read to him an occasional manuscript. One was “a letter nominally addressed to some gentlemen in Illinois, but really to the country and to the world.” After more than three years this assistant secretary leaves the White House, taking with him, as a precious souvenir, the latch key. Lincoln liked and trusted him. Undeniably he handled the mail.⁵⁶

Edward D. Neill had been an heroic and devoted army chaplain, highly praised by the colonel of his regiment, The First Minnesota.⁵⁷ He has recorded that “early in 1864” he was assigned to the White House, and “appointed to read and dispose of all letters ad-

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dressed to President Lincoln, and commissioned as secretary to sign land patents." Twice a day a mail bag filled with letters was brought to his room "at the President's Mansion." The chaplain's comments are pertinent and decidedly interesting. Lincoln as a writer was "fluent and forcible." His papers "bore few marks of revision." He "composed letters amid distractions which would have appalled other men." Chaplain Neill copied the important letter to A. G. Hodges for the President. He arranged in order of time the correspondence of the President with Francis P. Blair in February, 1865.

How much writing this secretary did for Lincoln we have no means of knowing. He was directed to write at least one telegram and to sign Lincoln's name to it. Chaplain Neill was willing to pen the order, "but preferred that he [Lincoln] should sign it." He took no liberties with the correspondence, the contents of which he knew well.⁵⁸ His narrative indicates that he was trusted and on intimate terms with the President, and in friendly contact with Hay, and, presumably, with Nicolay. He continued his work in the White House until a few days after the death of the President. This picture of his secretaryship is drawn from a paper read by him before the Minnesota Commandery of the Loyal Legion, and printed with other papers in a volume published in 1887. The chaplain's account justifies the tentative opinion, at least, that in the handling of routine mail the President made little distinction between the man who was with him one year and the men who spent all four of the war years with him in the Executive Mansion.

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JOHN HAY'S "WELL-NIGH PERFECT" IMITATIONS

As a rule those who hold that John Hay wrote many of the President's letters, including the letter to Mrs. Bixby, insist also that he so closely copied Lincoln's handwriting as to make detection difficult if not impossible. This is the view of Wakefield and Barbee, both of whom fortify themselves by a now familiar passage in Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler's autobiographical work *Across the Busy Years*. Mr. Wakefield quotes quite accurately the statement of the distinguished President of Columbia University: "As a matter of fact, Abraham Lincoln wrote very few letters that bore his signature. John G. Nicolay wrote almost all of those which were official, while John Hay wrote almost all of those which were personal. Hay was able to imitate Lincoln's handwriting and signature in well-nigh perfect fashion."⁵⁹ Mr. Wakefield has published also Dr. Butler's reply to a request for an explanation of Hay's concealment of these remarkable secretarial accomplishments: "John Hay was very secretive as to all his intimate personal relations with Lincoln, and frequently recorded as facts the public impression of what took place, he knowing perfectly well that something other was the case."⁶⁰

These statements are astonishing. Dr. Butler impeaches his own witness. He accepts his testimony on one point and destroys the value of his evidence on many other points by charging him with "frequently" deceiving the public, not by accidental ambiguities or by the careless use of words in informal conversations,

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but by the historical recording "as facts" of matters which he knew "perfectly well" were untrue. We have a higher opinion of John Hay. With his yokefellow, the senior secretary, he wrote the official biography of the Civil War President. Did they record in that monumental work numerous distortions of facts, knowing that they were putting a wrong slant on events? Dr. Alfred L. P. Dennis allows that "both of them were so influenced by their memory of the martyred President that at times they portray an idealized character."⁶¹ To be sure, they had to please Robert T. Lincoln. What his blue pencil may have done to some passages we can only guess. Some facts were stated in a tactful manner. The biographers avowed their aim to have been to write an "absolutely honest history." They assured the public that they had "in no case relied upon our own memory." On the contrary, they had "trusted only our diaries and memoranda of the moment; and in the documents and reports we have cited we have used incessant care to secure authenticity." Errors of judgment doubtless were made. They had in their keeping "all the official and private papers and manuscripts" in the possession of Lincoln's son, and by "industry or by purchase" they had acquired all the other material they could obtain.⁶² Subsequent discoveries have altered their perspective in some instances, and necessitated the qualification of their conclusions. But we cannot subscribe to the wholesale invalidation of their facts by Dr. Butler.

We are reminded of the long letter which Hay wrote to Nicolay on August 10, 1885, about a year before their *History* began its run in *The Century Magazine*,

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and five years before their expanded preface was inserted in the first volume of the ten which now embody their labors. The letter is quoted in full by both the biographers of Hay, William Roscoe Thayer and Tyler Dennett. It is concerned throughout with the writing of the huge work on which they were collaborating. At the end Hay said: "We will not fall in with the present tone of blubbering sentiment, of course. But we ought to write the history of those times like two everlasting angels who know everything, judge everything, tell the truth about everything, and don't care a twang of their harps about one side or the other. There will be one exception. We are Lincoln men all through. But in other little matters, let us look at men as insects and not blame the black beetle because he is not a grasshopper." It is in this letter also that Hay says: "We should *seem* fair" to McClellan "while we are destroying him." Hay appended a postscript: "Destroy this letter. It would be too great a temptation to any reporter who should pick it up."⁶³

Thayer's comments on this letter are interesting. "That the two secretaries should carry into middle life the supreme enthusiasm of their youth," he says, "that their judgments should be tinged by past prejudices, that they should even feel it to be a duty to show up delinquents who had escaped exposure during the war, was inevitable." They "never dissembled" the fact that they were Lincoln men. In the opinion of Dennett, Hay "wrote furiously to do justice to a slandered friend, to set a nation right." That the *History* is vulnerable in some respects is better known today than a half-century ago, but the worst possible construction of

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what Hay wrote to Nicolay falls short of the numerous deceptions which are definitely charged in President Butler's letter. Nicolay and Hay gave their hero "all the breaks." A considered and sound judgment is offered by Professor Roy P. Basler, who says: "To Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln was a hero, and unavoidably their sentiment tended to present him as a hero. The legend naturally influenced their expression, but there is no evidence that they wilfully misrepresented the man they had known."⁶⁴ However, none of these writers refers to McClellan's case.

TOO SWEEPING A CLAIM

Equally sweeping and astonishing is the assertion that Lincoln's senior secretary wrote "almost all" of the President's "official" letters, while the assistant secretary wrote "almost all" the letters of a "personal" nature. That Nicolay and Hay wrote some of Lincoln's letters is admitted. Most of these, we think, were examined by the President, corrected in some instances, and signed by him. Thus they became Lincoln's own. But surely Dr. Butler would agree that his language is not sufficiently discriminating. How many are "almost all"? We have ourselves seen many facsimiles of letters which the world long ago accepted as Abraham Lincoln's, written in his very readable though often rough and hurried script, couched in language that all informed persons recognize as characteristic of the man who split rails in his youth and in his mature years practiced law in the county seats of a frontier state.

Nobody yet has had the temerity to challenge Lincoln's authorship of the famous letter to General

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Hooker or the cogent and powerful letter to Horace Greeley. The long argumentative letters, addressed to individuals but intended for the whole world, were, as we shall see, the work of the man who took on Stephen A. Douglas for the forensic duel of 1858, and who composed the Cooper Institute Address. As examples of short and polite notes, cordial yet somewhat formal, may be mentioned the letter to Edward Everett relating to the ceremonies at Gettysburg, and the letter of December 12, 1861, to the Rev. George H. Stewart, concerning his plans for the Christian Commission. For brief notes of a very different character, we refer to the letter of July 13, 1863, to General Grant, containing the sentence "You were right and I was wrong"; the short and sharp admonition of April 7, 1865, also to Grant, wherein with the prospect of the surrender of Lee in sight, he said "Let the *thing* be pushed"; and the very pointed question, addressed to General McClellan, on October 24, 1862, asking ". . . what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigues anything." As an example of a letter which the President might well have directed a secretary to write, we cite the note, in Lincoln's hand indubitably, of January 10, 1865, to John W. Garrett, the President of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, expressing his concern over the coal supply for the city of Washington. In this note, by the way, Lincoln also wrote "Executive Mansion" at the top of the paper. David Homer Bates in his familiar account of *Lincoln in the Telegraph Office*, notes that the scores of telegrams he sent out week after week "were almost without exception in his own handwriting." By way of contrast,

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we submit the note of May 20, 1862, written in response to a request for his autograph for the wife of a member of the British Cabinet. The rustic from the prairies sent her this:

“Mr. Lyon has informed me that Lady Villiers has expressed a wish for my autograph. I beg that her Ladyship will accept the assurance of my sincere gratification at this opportunity of subscribing myself

*Very truly
Her Ladyship's obedient servant
A. Lincoln.”*⁶⁵

The President wielded the pen of a ready writer, not that he hurried the composition of any document of high importance, nor that he disregarded the courtesy of painstaking on occasion. When he began to write he knew what he wanted to say. Erasures were infrequent. We know that he scribbled many messages on cards and scraps of paper that in an office managed on modern efficiency methods would have been delegated to a secretary. Lincoln would have been the despair of an efficiency expert. John Hay has told how impossible Nicolay and he found it to be to regulate their chief by any rules. He wrote letters in a variety of styles. Many routine matters may have been taken over by his assistants. But no evidence has been found to warrant the idea that the letters we cherish as Lincoln's were not his own.

ACTUAL CASES ARE LACKING

And now again: could and did John Hay almost perfectly imitate Lincoln's signature and handwriting?

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For a long time Lincoln students have been searching for evidence. Actual cases are wanted. None is brought forward. Dr. Butler replied to our inquiry in April, 1945, by the general statement that "It is, I think, well known that John Hay imitated Lincoln's signature constantly and skillfully."⁶⁶ This time he said nothing about handwriting. Nobody who challenges the President's writing of the Bixby letter has furnished examples. Inquiry among outstanding Lincoln authorities has yielded replies which are well represented by this sentence in a letter from Professor Roy P. Basler: "I have searched a long while without finding more than one instance of what might be considered an imitation, and I have found no one who knows anything much about Lincoln manuscripts who can suggest where to look, beyond the many photostats and manuscripts which I have examined."⁶⁷ Mr. Basler has found, as have we, that those who speak as though they know are indefinite when actual instances are demanded; they all go all around the central point.

We offer the single case to which Dr. Basler alludes, a case which Lincolnians have known about for nearly twenty years. This is a telegram in the Brown University Library, a facsimile of which is given in the volume of *Lincoln Letters Hitherto Unpublished*, issued by the University in 1927. Professor Basler's present judgment is that John Hay was not trying in this alleged instance to imitate the President's handwriting, and, if he was, that he did anything but an almost perfect job.⁶⁸ In the Brown University publication the telegram is dated "December 21, 1864." This may be an error. Various authorities read the year as "1862."

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We substitute the earlier year in placing this telegram in our record:

“Washington Dec. 21, 1862

Mrs. A. Lincoln

Continental Hotel

Do not come on the night train. It is too cold. Come in the morning.

A. Lincoln”

The President was thinking about Mrs. Lincoln's comfort in a December trip from Philadelphia to the Capital. Below the telegram are these lines:

“Please send above and oblige the President.

John Hay

A. P. S.”

All of this is understood to be in the handwriting of the assistant private secretary. With facsimiles at hand readers may make up their own minds. We offer only a few observations. The body of the telegram and the note below are in Hay's script. As to the “A. Lincoln,” as the name appears in the address, and the signature, we are not in doubt. Neither is such a signature as the President would have hurriedly written at that time. Both are too “smooth” for such a document. Examples of rapidly written signatures, easy to read but scrawls by comparison with the neat and perfectly aligned signature below this telegram, justify our opinion that this is not a product of Lincoln's pen. There are other facsimiles in the Brown University volume which indicate how great a difference there is between in-

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disputably genuine signatures and the one in question. As an example of the way the President signed a telegram in 1862, we have his wire to General Fremont, of May 30 in that year. Here is no attempt at "nice" lettering. An illustration of the way he signed in 1864 may be found in his telegram to General Butler, dated January 21, in which appears the same indifference to looks which is notable in the message of two years before. In both there are two dots after the "A.", a sort of double period. And in both the surname wobbles below and then above the line.⁶⁹ Throughout those years the President signed telegrams in the same characteristic manner, and that is not the way in which the telegram to Mrs. Lincoln was signed. At a hasty glance it does look like Lincoln's hand; it does not survive careful scrutiny.

However, the imitation of an ordinary signature is usually not very difficult. But the imitation of the handwriting in a letter or a document is another thing altogether. Only "experts" can do that, and such forgers usually betray themselves sooner or later. Imagine John Hay, or some other secretary or clerk, laboriously trying to piece together a duplicate of Lincoln's chirography, letter by letter, and word by word, with the idea of producing a paper that would deceive anybody familiar with his handwriting. We can find neither examples nor arguments which justify the opinion that "Hay was able to imitate Lincoln's handwriting and signature in well-nigh perfect fashion."

In reply to an inquiry from Professor Basler, President Butler wrote: "All I can say in response to your question is that it was Robert T. Lincoln himself, Abra-

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ham Lincoln's son, who told me that it was the custom of John Hay to write in the name of Lincoln all letters of a non-political kind and that he, Hay, imitated Lincoln's handwriting admirably. Robert T. Lincoln certainly knew what he was talking about." ⁷⁰

ROBERT T. LINCOLN'S MISTAKE

Again we must record our dissent. We do not think that Lincoln's son meant to say what this statement says when interpreted literally. John Hay did not compose the President's personal letters, write them out in an admirable imitation of his handwriting, and either append an imitation signature, or pass them over to the President for signing. He did write some letters in his own undisguised handwriting, and some of these Lincoln signed, while others Hay signed with his official position duly designated below his name. Even the telegram to Mrs. Lincoln to which we have directed attention, besides its non-Lincolnian script, has a line below the message, signed by John Hay, in which he says that "the President" will be "obliged" if the operators will kindly send the wire, and he added below his name the letters "A. P. S.," meaning "Assistant Private Secretary."

How could Robert T. Lincoln know that Hay wrote "all letters of a non-political kind"? "All" this time; not "almost all." He had had little opportunity to learn about such matters from his father. During the war years he spent nearly all his time away from Washington. Only a few weeks after his father's death, in reply to a letter from Dr. J. G. Holland, who proposed to write a biography which would be "rather personal

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than political," Robert Lincoln said: "I scarcely even had ten minutes quiet talk with him during his Presidency, on account of his constant devotion to business."⁷¹ We think John Hay was Robert Lincoln's informant, and we know that Hay used the word "wrote" in a loose and inexact way. That Hay did pass on this information to the younger Lincoln must be, probably, a matter of judgment.

However, Robert T. Lincoln, honest man as he was, sometimes was mistaken. We offer an illustration. On February 12, 1920, Senator Henry W. Keyes read in the Senate Chamber, from one of the manuscript copies made by the Civil War President, the Gettysburg Address. At that time the precious document had been in the possession of the senator's family for more than half a century. The proceedings in the senate were published as a Senate document. With them was included a facsimile of a letter from Robert T. Lincoln, dated December 16, 1885, to Miss Belle F. Keyes of Boston. In this letter he said: "My father's Gettysburg Address was jotted down in pencil, in part at least on his way to the place." He was mistaken, of course. He simply had not investigated the facts, but had adopted the widely accepted myth of Lincoln's having composed that speech on the train. He learned in later years that he was in error, and set the matter straight as opportunity offered. One who verifies Robert Lincoln's change of opinion is Earl Curzon. In a note to the lecture in which he rated the Address as one of the great masterpieces of the century, the British statesman mentioned the story about its having been "hastily scribbled on a sheet of paper as he went in a tramcar to

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the cemetery," and he added: "I was assured by his
son that the story is without foundation."⁷²

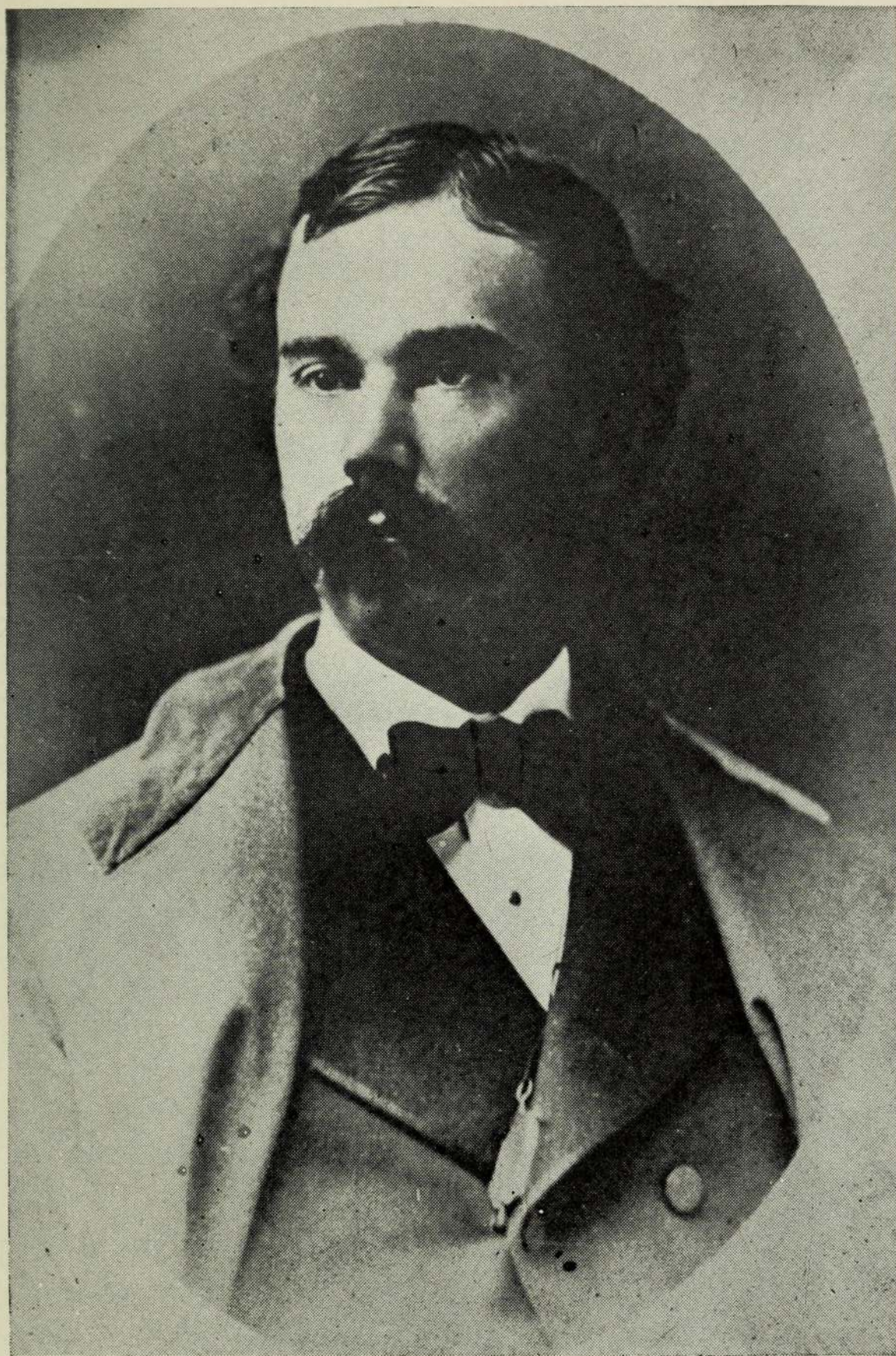
We think that more evidence than now is known to
exist is necessary to substantiate the claim that the
senior secretary wrote the President's official letters
and the assistant secretary the personal letters—always
with the proviso that by "wrote" is meant the actual
composition of the letters.

LETTERS THAT HAY DID WRITE

Hay's *Diary* contains references to two letters which
he composed. In the entry for October 20, 1863, he
said: "Today I induced the President to sign a letter
I wrote to Col. Rowland approving his proposed Na-
tional Rifle Corps. I think Rowland himself rather a
humbug but his idea is a good one." In 1878 the diarist
added a note: "I was not old enough to know that a
good idea is worthless in the hands of a 'humbug.'" ⁷³
That letter was left out of Nicolay and Hay's edition
of the *Complete Works* of Lincoln. Four days later
Hay wrote a letter, to which he alludes in the October
26 entry, and which is included in the collections. This
is the letter to George H. Boker, which in the *Diary* is
stated to have been written on October 24, although the
date in the anthology is October 26: ⁷⁴

*"It is with heartfelt gratification that I acknowl-
edge the receipt of your communication of the 6th,
and the accompanying medal, by which I am made an
honorary member of the Union League of Phila-
delphia.*

"I shall always bear with me the consciousness of



JOHN HAY

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having endeavored to do my duty in the trying times through which we are passing, and the generous approval of a portion of my fellow-citizens so intelligent and so patriotic as those composing your association assures me that I have not wholly failed.

"I could not ask, and no one could merit, a better reward.

"Be kind enough, sir, to convey to the gentlemen whom you represent, the assurance of the grateful appreciation with which I accept the honor you have conferred upon me.

I am very truly your obedient servant,

*A. Lincoln."*⁷⁵

What a contrast between the style of the President and the style of his junior secretary! No glimmer of Lincoln flickers in this very correct note to Boker. It is to the everlasting honor of John Hay that he did appreciate the character and the ability of the man with whom for four tremendous years he was closely associated in the White House. But the young man did not in any composition which can fairly be claimed for him manifest any adequate faculty for the manner in which Lincoln composed letters, whatever may be said about the handwriting.

In the Henry E. Huntington Library there is a group of four documents which in the opinion of the custodians provided perfect opportunities for the imitation of the Presidential signature. One, of date February 5, 1863, is an "authorization for the seal of the United States to be affixed to the envelope of a letter . . . to the President . . . of Paraguay." Secretary

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Hay filled out the printed form and Lincoln did his own signing. Another, of the same month, filled out by Hay, and bearing indubitably the Lincoln signature, authorized the seal to be "affixed to the Convention with Peru. . . ." A third formal paper of the same general description, and also carrying a February date, is the "Ratification to the Convention with Ecuador." And the last of the series, dated February 28, 1863, is the Authorization for the seal to be placed upon a "Power of Attorney to Christopher Robinson to exchange Ratifications to the Convention between the United States and Peru," duly filled out by Hay and signed by Lincoln. These are excellent examples of the routine, run-of-the-mine documents which the President naturally, and practically of necessity, would turn over to his assistants.

The Huntington also has two letters, "penned by Hay, signed by Lincoln," addressed to General David Hunter, dated respectively June 9 and June 30, 1863. Here is the first:

"My dear Sir: I find it still impossible to answer at length your communication received through Captain Kinzie. I am unwilling to detain him longer, and have directed him to return to Hilton Head.

*Very truly yours,
A. Lincoln."*⁷⁶

The second is longer:

"My dear General: I have just received your letter of the 25th of June.

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“I assure you, and you may feel authorized in stating, that the recent change of commanders in the Department of the South was made for no reasons which convey any imputation upon your known energy, efficiency, and patriotism; but for causes which seemed sufficient, while they were in no degree incompatible with the respect and esteem in which I have always held you as a man and an officer.

“I cannot, by giving my consent to a publication of whose details I know nothing, assume the responsibility of whatever you may write. In this matter your own sense of military propriety must be your guide, and the regulations of the service your rule of conduct.

I am very truly your friend,

*A. Lincoln.”*⁷⁷

About the first of these letters there is nothing of note either in style or content. The second handles deftly a delicate situation. Lincoln signed it and thus made it his own. Whether Hay was more than an amanuensis, or if Lincoln amended his secretary's phrasing, we have no means of knowing.

Also in the Huntington is a letter, signed by Lincoln, of December 17, 1863, addressed to James H. Hoes, who had “donated a gold watch which was to be awarded to the individual who should make the largest contribution” to the Sanitary Commission Fair in Chicago in the fall of that year. Lincoln sent the original draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. It sold for \$3,000 and the Commission sent him the watch. The President sent the following acknowledgment:⁷⁸

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“My dear Sir: I have received from the Sanitary Commission of Chicago, the watch which you placed at their disposal, and I take the liberty of conveying to you my high appreciation of your humanity and generosity, of which I have unexpectedly become the beneficiary. I am very truly yours,

*A. Lincoln.”*⁷⁹

IMPORTANT LETTERS NOT WRITTEN BY LINCOLN

Washington in those days was anything but a salubrious city. The President took no vacations, although he sometimes sent one of his secretaries away for rest and recuperation. In the summer of 1863 Nicolay went all the way to the Rocky Mountains, and the assistant secretary, carrying on alone, sent intimate letters to his colleague. One day the town was as “dismal as a defaced tombstone”; another day as “dull as an obsolete almanac.” But as to Lincoln: “The old man sits here and wields like a backwoods Jupiter the bolts of war and the machinery of government . . .” John Hay was hitting his stride as a letter writer, only the style was his own and not Lincoln’s. In this lively communication, which is inserted in lieu of a *Diary* entry for September 11, the young man commented with glowing enthusiasm on Lincoln’s “last letter.” It was “a great thing.” Some of the rhetoric was “hideously bad.” It contained “indecorums” that were “infamous.” All the same it would take “its solid place in history, as a great utterance of a great man.” The President could “snake a sophism out of its hole, better than all the trained logicians of all schools.”

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This passage is one of the most revealing things in John Hay's Civil War writings. He would never incur the guilt of bad rhetoric, nor commit outrageous literary indecorums; nevertheless he rose to that letter as a masterpiece.

After a quarter-century, the judgment of the junior partner was reaffirmed in the celebrated biography which was the joint production of the former secretaries. Toward the end of their seventh volume they dealt at length with this letter. It was "unique" among the President's state papers. It might be called "his last stump speech, the only one made during his Presidency." They found in it "all the qualities that made him in Illinois the incomparable political leader." The logic was "unerring." It had "the same touch of picturesque eloquence," and the style was "as remarkable as the matter."

This letter was written on August 26, and sent to James C. Conkling, in reply to an invitation to attend "a mass meeting of unconditional Union men" in the President's home town on September 3.

But Abraham Lincoln did not "write" that letter. It was not "written" by John Hay, nor of course by Nicolay. It was "written" by an unknown scribe. Can anybody doubt its authorship? The penman we cannot name, but this "unique" letter is all Lincoln.⁸⁰

A much longer and more important message, designed by the writer, like that to Conkling, not for the eyes only of a small group of men but for the attention of the whole people of the United States, is the letter of June 12, 1863, addressed to Erastus Corning and others, at Albany. Essentially it is a public document,

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containing a detailed statement of the policy of the Administration. At least one investigator has identified the penmanship as that of Nicolay. The joint biographers of the President, also in their seventh volume, devote several pages to it. The letter was written with extreme care and should command "the close perusal of every student" of American history. It was "courteous" in tone and candid, but "stern" in purpose, clear in statement, "terse" in argument. It produced a strong impression on the public mind. The historians, one of whom may have "written" the letter, had no doubt of its origin. It was "remarkable" and belonged "in the long series of Mr. Lincoln's political writings."^{80a}

We complete this phase of our inquiry by an examination of one more Lincoln letter of high significance. Horatio Seymour, governor of New York, was much troubled about the conscription plan of the Federal Government, in early August, 1863. In his *Diary* entry for the sixth of that month, John Hay noted that "the President has recd an enormous letter from Seymour about the draft, and intends to enforce the draft with such arrangements as will take from the present enrollment its present look of unfairness. He says he is willing and anxious to have the matter before the courts." Lincoln's letter to Seymour was written on August 7. In his *Diary* notes of the tenth, the assistant secretary wrote: "Today the answer of the President to Seymour was printed: everybody seems to consider it as a sockdolager to the Governor."⁸¹

The letter is well known, and is found in all editions of Lincoln's works. It is long, filling three quarto pages.

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We have not seen a facsimile. It was offered for sale at auction in Philadelphia on January 26, 1943. The catalogue states that "the body" of the letter "is in the hand of John Hay."⁸² With this in mind, let the letter be read with more than ordinary attention.

EXECUTIVE MANSION

"Washington, August 7th, 1863.

*His Excellency,
Horatio Seymour,
Governor of New York.*

"Your communication of the 3d inst. has been received, and attentively considered.

"I cannot consent to suspend the draft in New York as you request; because, among other reasons, time is too important.

"By the figures you send, which I presume are correct, the twelve Districts represented fell into two classes of eight and four respectively. The disparity of the quotas for the draft, in these two classes is certainly very striking, being the difference between an average of 2,200 in one class, and 4,864 in the other. Assuming that the Districts are equal, one to another, in entire population, as required by the plan on which they were made, this disparity is such as to require attention. Much of it, however, I suppose will be accounted for by the fact that so many more persons fit for soldiers, are in the city than are in the country, who have too recently arrived from other parts of the United States and from Europe to be either included in the Census of 1860, or to have voted in 1862. Still, making due allowance for this,

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I am yet unwilling to stand upon it as an entirely sufficient explanation of the great disparity.

“I shall direct the draft to proceed in all the Districts, drawing however, at first, from each of the four Districts, to wit, the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth, only 2200, being the average quota of the other class. After this drawing, these four Districts, and also the seventeenth and twenty ninth, shall be carefully re-enrolled, and, if you please, agents of yours may witness every step of the process. Any deficiency which may appear by the new Enrollment, will be supplied by a special draft for that object, allowing due credits for volunteers who may be obtained from these Districts respectively, during the interval. And at all points, so far as consistent with practical convenience, due credit will be given for volunteers; and your Excellency shall be notified of the time fixed for commencing a draft in each District.

“I do not object to abide a decision of the United States Supreme Court, or of the judges thereof, on the constitutionality of the draft law. In fact, I should be willing to facilitate the obtaining of it; but I cannot consent to lose the time while it is being obtained. We are contending with an enemy who, as I understand, drives every able bodied man he can reach, into his ranks, very much as a butcher drives bullocks into a slaughter pen. No time is wasted, no argument is used. This produces an army which will soon turn upon our now victorious soldiers already in the field, if they shall not be sustained by recruits, as they should be. It produces an army with a

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rapidity not to be matched on our side, if we first waste time to re-experiment with the volunteer system, already deemed by Congress, and palpably, in fact, so far exhausted, as to be inadequate; and then more time to obtain a Court decision, as to whether a law is Constitutional, which requires a part of those not now in the service, to go to the aid of those who are already in it, and still more time, to determine with absolute certainty, that we get those, who are to go, in the precisely legal proportion, to those who are not to go.

“My purpose is to be in such action just and constitutional; and yet practical in performing the important duty, with which I am charged of maintaining the unity, and the free principles of our common country.

Your obedient servant

*A. Lincoln.”*⁸³

We think that Lincoln had a good deal to do with the composition of this letter. Secretary Hay in his *Diary* showed himself to understand well the points the President intended to make. They had talked about it. Hay knew the contents of Lincoln's mind before he began to write. The argumentative passages remind one of the way in which the older man had learned to drive home his views. We do not believe the fastidious young man would have used the sentence about the driving of bullocks to slaughter. Study of the letter floods the mind with questions. Was it dictated? Did the man who signed it alter or amend its original form? Where among the known writings of Hay is there any indica-

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tion that at the age of 25 he was able to epitomize an argument with the brevity, completeness, and simple cogency, as the President's position is stated in the penultimate paragraph of this letter? It *was* a "sock-dolager." We are confident that Lincoln supervised the forging of that projectile.

In the patient examination of Hay's *Diary* we find substantial support for our opinion. The diarist, for example, in his entries for one period of three weeks mentions the writing of ten letters. On July 21, 1863, the President "received" and "answered" a letter from General Howard. On the 23rd "he wrote an answer" to Governor Gamble. On the last day of the month he "received a letter from General Meade in answer to one he had written," and on that day also he "wrote a letter to Steve Hurlbut." Among the matters mentioned as of August 6 is a letter "the President has written Banks." Two letters are spoken of in the entry for August 9. Hay says "I believe" that "he wrote" in a certain way, "to Grant today," and that "he wrote also to Rosecrans." And on August 10, besides a reference to the letter to Seymour, the record reads that "the President today wrote a letter to the East Tennesseans." One other letter belongs in this list, written on July 29. The diarist says: "The President today wrote a letter to General Halleck." This letter in fact is in Hay's handwriting. Yet, the President "wrote" it. Did Hay pen all the others, except the one to Grant? And if he did would not the only fair inference be that the actual author was Lincoln? ⁸⁴

We have searched with a good deal of care for any real evidence that the young secretary, for whom the

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President manifested almost a fatherly affection and to whom he entrusted several important administrative missions, actually composed any large number of papers which might be classed as letters, or any at all of his most carefully composed letters treating of affairs of state. Nobody has brought forward any definite and convincing confirmation of the claim that John Hay could or did imitate perfectly the President's handwriting. We have gone out of our way in striving to be fair to those who hold other views. Such questions can be settled only on the basis of definite proof. Gossip, rumor, prejudice, the unverified recollections of honest men of what had happened long before, are not enough. In some instances there have been misunderstandings, no doubt. Differences of interpretation often arise among high-minded truth seekers.

A LITTLE WORD LINCOLN LIKED

That accomplished Lincoln scholar, Dr. William H. Townsend, has called attention to Lincoln's frequent use of the adverb "so." He rightly points to its presence twice in the brief letter to Mrs. Bixby—"a loss so overwhelming," "so costly a sacrifice." In the letter written on the same day to Deacon John Phillips, the Massachusetts centenarian, who had voted in every Presidential election from the founding of the Government, the President four times employed that handy and expressive word—"so honorable a part," "a citizen so venerable," "so long and so well." Even in so carefully prepared an Address as that at Gettysburg, this "little fellow," as Lincoln called such two-letter words, was used three times—"so conceived and so dedicated,"

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“so nobly advanced.” Probably a careful reading of any collection of the President’s papers would disclose many similar instances. Turning to a document which must have been composed with the most scrupulous attention to exactitude of statement, dealing as it does with the issue of disunion, we find in the first message to Congress, of July 4, 1861, twenty-one instances of the use of this word. We disregard such ordinary expressions as “so called,” “so far,” “so much,” “done so,” and have left these examples of his liking for this monosyllable: “to so abandon,” “so vast and so sacred,” “rendered so,” “keep the case so free,” “so viewing the issue,” “so to resist force,” “may so accord,” “so extraordinary and so long continued.” The message might be read as an illustration of literary streamlining.

Having occasion to consult the letter of September 22, 1861, to Orville H. Browning, we notice six “so’s” in the three pages. We do not count four of these, although they indicate Lincoln’s habit. Such locutions as “to do so” and “more so” are common. But “I also think and so privately wrote General Fremont” is characteristic, and “to so hold it as long as necessity lasts” is Lincolnistic and a split infinitive besides. He liked short words. The people would understand them.⁸⁵

“OUR HEAVENLY FATHER”

Now we come to a truly amazing affirmation in the *Quarterly’s* attempt to make good the claim that its article contains “the plain truth about the Bixby letter.” Both Mr. Wakefield and Mr. Barbee stress the argument that Lincoln would not have used the phrase

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“our Heavenly Father” in any such letter that he might have written. Mr. Wakefield writes with caution on this phase of the question. If Lincoln believed in a “Heavenly Father” why did he “fail to give the consolation of religion to a loved friend in a letter of condolence”—meaning Miss McCullough—“and then extend it to an utter stranger?”—meaning Mrs. Bixby. “It is known,” he continues, “that Lincoln was frequently influenced by members of his Cabinet . . . to insert pious phrases in his public documents, generally for political reasons. We know, for instance, that the original draft of the Gettysburg Address as written by his own hand did not contain the words ‘under God.’ It may well be, if he wrote the Bixby letter at all, that ‘our Heavenly Father’ was inserted for the same reason, as such a letter could not fail of great publicity.”⁸⁶

Thus Mr. Wakefield aligns himself with the relatively small group of anti-Lincolnians who accuse the Civil War President of hypocrisy. Without lingering upon the point we simply say, in passing, that Abraham Lincoln, while unable, as a man of absolute honesty, to subscribe without reservations to the systems of theology for which the churches stood, was one of the most deeply religious men of his time, and during the war years he was constantly meditating upon the will of God as manifested in the supreme crisis of the nation whose affairs he had been designated to guide and supervise.

But Mr. Barbee, with astonishing temerity, goes away out on a limb which cracks under his weight and deposits him on the ground. He says: “This one expression,” that is, “Our Heavenly Father,” “forever

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condemns the [Bixby] letter as being no part of his brain and heart and soul," and "Lincoln did not believe that God is 'our Heavenly Father' and he would have recoiled in horror from using such a term."⁸⁷

The plain truth is that Abraham Lincoln many times used phrases similar to, or equivalent to, these words, and thrice, at least, used these exact words, and once besides invoked prayers to "our Father in Heaven."

Merely a glance at the vouchers we submit herewith should be enough to justify our surprise at the contrary assumption. We present first three examples from the President's proclamations. On April 10, 1862, he issued a proclamation of thanksgiving, in which these words are found:

"It has pleased Almighty God to vouchsafe signal victories to the land and naval forces . . . It is therefore recommended to the people of the United States that . . . they especially acknowledge and render thanks to *our Heavenly Father* for these inestimable blessings; that they . . . implore spiritual consolation in behalf of all who have been brought into affliction by the casualties and calamities of . . . war . . ."

In another proclamation of thanksgiving, sent out on September 3, 1864, we find the same devotional tone. The President said: "The signal success that divine Providence has recently vouchsafed to the operations of the United States fleet and army . . . call for devout acknowledgment . . . It is requested that . . . prayer be made for . . . blessings and comfort from *the Father of mercies* to the sick, wounded, and prisoners, and to the orphans and widows of those who have fallen . . ."

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And only a few weeks later, on October 20, 1864, there was issued from the White House a proclamation setting apart the last Thursday in November as "a day of thanksgiving and praise to Almighty God, the beneficent Creator and Ruler of the universe." In this document the President said: "It has also pleased *our heavenly Father* to favor as well our citizens in their homes as our soldiers in their camps, and our sailors on the rivers and seas, with unusual health. . . ." ⁸⁸

If it be said that these are only perfunctory expressions which the public would consider appropriate for such documents, or that they probably were inserted by, or at the instigation of, the secretary of state who was a warden in the Episcopal Church, we reply that the President signed his full name to all these proclamations, and assumed the full responsibility for them. We point out also that all doubtless were issued upon the President's own initiative. We further record our opinion that they expressed his personal emotions.

In the prewar years we find illustrations of the practice of Lincoln as a private citizen. In February, 1842, he pronounced a brief eulogy, before the Washingtonian Society of his home town, on his "much respected" fellow member, Benjamin Ferguson, from which we quote the final sentence:

"To Almighty God we commend him; and, in His name, implore the aid and protection, of His omnipotent right arm, for his bereaved and disconsolate family." The sentiment is there, although the style is not that of the Lincoln we know best.

In July of 1850, again a private citizen, after a term in Congress, he delivered a eulogy on Zachary Taylor,

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the President for whose election he had taken the stump in 1848. Lincoln reviewed his career, expressed his apprehension that an amicable adjustment of "the great question of the day" might be hindered by his death, and continued: "Yet, under all circumstances, trusting to our Maker, and through his wisdom and beneficence, to the great body of our people, we will not despair, nor despond."

After two more years Lincoln was designated for a similar service in expressing the grief of his fellow citizens over the passing of Henry Clay. In the State House at Springfield, on July 16, 1852, he delivered his eulogy. This was his conclusion: "Such a man the times have demanded, and such in the providence of God was given us. But he is gone. Let us strive to deserve, as far as mortals may, the continued care of Divine Providence, trusting that in future national emergencies He will not fail to provide us the instruments of safety and security." We do not italicize any passages in these eulogies, not because the ideas are different, but because the language does not so closely conform with that in the letter to Mrs. Bixby. Perhaps these also may be construed as only a formal compliance with public ideas of propriety. The speaker was known in Springfield, however, as one who formulated his own thoughts in his own way.⁸⁹

We offer now two letters of a distinctly personal character. On January 12, 1851, Lincoln had occasion to write to his half-brother, John D. Johnston. Their father was ill and would "hardly recover." The relations between the father and son had been such that a meeting might be "more painful than pleasant." He

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would have his father "confide in our great and good and merciful Maker, who will not turn away from him in any extremity. He notes the fall of a sparrow, and numbers the hairs of our heads, and He will not forget the dying man who puts his trust in Him." With this the son assured his half-brother of his desire to aid his father and stepmother, and authorized the use of his name in providing them with comfort and care. The letter contains other allusions to "the help of God," and refers to the hope of a meeting with "loved ones gone before." It is more than a conventional expression of superficial emotions.

Another letter, very short and entirely different in character, was written in the White House on August 9, 1862, to the son of Henry Clay. Lincoln writes to thank him for a snuffbox which he had received the day before as a "memento" of his "great and patriotic father." The President refers to "your venerable mother, so long the partner of his bosom and his honors, and lingering now where he was but for the call to rejoin him where he is . . ." By no possibility can this note fairly be considered to have been designed for any purpose other than the sincere assurance of the sentiments of the writer.⁹⁰

What other explanation can there be for the examples with which we now conclude this discussion than that they are the spontaneous expressions of the man himself? We present them without comment; they need none. In October, 1862, a little group of Quakers called upon the President. They were doing what the spirit had moved them to do. Their leader was Mrs. Eliza P. Gurney. She assured him that theirs was not a visit of

Executive Mansion,

Washington, September 4, 1864.

Eliza P. Gurney.

My esteemed friend,

I have not forgotten—probably never shall forget—the very impressive occasion when yourself and friends visited me on a Sabbath forenoon two years ago. Nor has your kind letter, written nearly a year later, ever been forgotten. In all, it has been your purpose to strengthen my reliance on God, I am much indebted to the good Christian people of this country for their constant prayers and consolations; and to none of them, more than to yourself. The purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in our lives. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this; but God knows best, and has ruled otherwise. We shall yet acknowledge His wisdom and our own error therein. Meanwhile we must work earnestly in the best light He gives us, trusting that so working still con-
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The letter of President Lincoln to Mrs. Eliza P.

Gurney, of September 4, 1864,

ces to the great ends he obtains. Surely he intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay.

Your people - the Friends - have had, and are having, a very great trial. On principle, and faith, opposed to both war and oppression, they cannot by practically oppose oppression by war. In this hard dilemma, some have chosen one or the other. For those appealing to me on conscientious grounds, I have done, and shall do, the best I could and can, in my own conscience, under my oath to the law. That you believe this I doubt not; and believing it, I shall still receive, for our country and myself, your earnest prayers to our Father in Heaven.

Your sincere friend
A. Lincoln.

in which he invoked her "prayers to our Father in Heaven."

"idle curiosity," and, rejoicing in "his noble effort . . . to let the oppressed go free," and, with prayer, they commended him to God. Immediately on their return to their hotel they made a record of the reply of the

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President. It will be found in the Lincoln anthologies. Essentially this response was a meditation upon the divine will. And the President said: "In the very responsible position in which I happen to be placed, being a humble instrument in the hands of *our Heavenly Father*, as I am, and as we all are, to work out his great purposes, I have desired that all my works and acts may be according to his will, and that it might be so, I have sought his aid. . . ."

Yet more definite and impressive, as the product of his own pen and not the united effort of a few sincere friends to recall his words, is the letter of the President to his "Esteemed Friend," Mrs. Gurney, bearing the date, September 4, 1864. It is the more significant because it was just seventy-eight days later that he wrote the letter to the widow in Boston. This letter to Mrs. Gurney is owned by the Pennsylvania Historical Society, at whose building in Philadelphia it was inspected about a year ago by one of our friends. It is eminently a religious, indeed, a devotional expression of the "brain and heart and soul" of the writer. We give its correct rendering below—for the anthologies do not have it precisely right—and reproduce the beautiful letter in facsimile on an adjacent page.⁹¹

"Eliza P. Gurney,

My esteemed friend.

I have not forgotten—probably never shall forget—the very impressive occasion when yourself and friends visited me on a Sabbath forenoon two years ago—Nor has your kind letter, written nearly a year later, ever been forgotten. In all, it has been your

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purpose to strengthen my reliance on God. I am much indebted to the good Christian people of the country for their constant prayers and consolations; and to no one of them, more than to yourself. The purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in advance. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this; but God knows best, and has ruled otherwise. We shall yet acknowledge His wisdom and our own error therein. Meanwhile we must work earnestly in the best light He gives us, trusting that so working still conduces to the great ends He ordains. Surely He intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay.

Your people—The Friends—have had, and are having, a very great trial. On principle, and faith, opposed to both war and oppression, they can only practically oppose oppression by war. In this hard dilemma, some have chosen one horn and some the other. For those appealing to me on conscientious grounds, I have done, and shall do, the best I could and can, in my own conscience, under my oath to the law. That you believe this I doubt not; and believing it, I shall still receive, for our country and myself, your earnest prayers to our Father in Heaven.

Your sincere friend

A. Lincoln.”⁹²

SOME QUESTIONS OF EVIDENCE

WITH this background of facts in view, we now proceed to consider the testimony on which in the main the contention is founded that our letter was composed by President Lincoln's junior secretary. We bring forward also a few other bits of direct evidence, including an important written item by John Hay himself.

Our first witness is an English public man whose inquiries ended only in negative results. Mr. John A. Spender was for four years an assistant editor and leader writer, and then for a quarter-century, ending in 1921, the editor of the *Westminster Gazette*. John Hay he "knew well," he says in his reminiscences, and another American ambassador, who was "a newspaper proprietor and old journalist," Whitelaw Reid, he describes as disposed always to be kind to London newspaper men. Mr. Spender states that his "record contains a pleasant little correspondence with him about an essay which he wrote on Abraham Lincoln, and which raised a point I had discussed in earlier days with John Hay."⁹³ That last clause invited attention. Mr. Spender had been in Boston only a few years before the publication of his book. We wrote him. In his

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courteous reply he said: "The 'little correspondence' referred to in my book raised the question of John Hay's part in certain speeches and writings, especially the famous letter of condolence, which bears Lincoln's name. Perhaps I ought not to have mentioned it, and certainly it ought not to go further, since, so far as I know, the question has never been raised, and could not be raised on anything that Hay himself said to me." The obvious inference is that rumors were quietly in circulation which involved the question of what share Hay may have had in the writings alluded to. Since the question has now been definitely "raised" for all the public to hear, it seems reasonable to assume that the writer would not object to the citation of this letter which he wrote in 1928. Naturally one wonders how the "little correspondence" arose and where the original rumor started.

On the second Sunday in May, 1933, the editorial page of *The New York Times* contained a definite attribution to Mr. Hay of the writing of our message of condolence. The title was "The Authorship of Happy Sayings." In the first paragraph the editor alluded to the death of Colonel Charles E. Stanton, and said that he would be remembered as the actual author of the felicitous sentence, "Lafayette, we are here," which had been attributed to General Pershing. Other examples followed. Not Cambronne but a Paris journalist said: "The Old Guard dies, but never surrenders." Not Grant but Chase originated "The way to resume is to resume." Pinckney said: "It is 'No, not a sixpence,' instead of 'Millions for defense, not a cent for tribute.'" The closing paragraph was devoted to "the

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famous and often quoted 'Bixby letter,' with its moving reference to Mrs. Bixby's loss of her five sons in battle." Having quoted a portion of the letter, the editor said that it was "doubtless signed by Lincoln and is certainly characteristic of his language, but it was actually written by John Hay."⁹⁴

We wrote the *Times* at once. The editor, the late Rollo Ogden, writing on the following day, said: "I know of no scrap of documentary evidence, but Mr. Hay in his lifetime told more than one person that he really wrote the letter which Lincoln signed. Among others he confided this fact to the late W. C. Brownell, who told me of it at the time. Naturally, Mr. Hay took pains never publicly to claim the authorship, and, I presume, left nothing written which set the matter straight."

Here is an intimation of the origin of the rumors to which Mr. Spender referred. Let us recall that John Hay died on July 1, 1905. Mr. Brownell, essayist and critic, and for forty years editor and literary adviser for Charles Scribner's Sons, died in 1928. There was an interval of twenty-three years, at least, within which he gave Mr. Ogden his confidence. The letter of 1933 indicates clearly that Mr. Ogden understood "wrote" to mean composed, and not the copying of what another had produced. In the editorial he implied and in the letter he said definitely that the President signed the Bixby letter. The editorial and the editor's letter invite questions later to be considered. How significant is the allusion to Lincoln's characteristic language? Did Mr. Brownell correctly understand Mr.

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Hay? Did Hay mean complete and exclusive authorship, or partial and preliminary drafting with subsequent revision by another writer?

This witness, Mr. Brownell, by the way, is one whom Mr. Wakefield and Mr. Barbee seem never to have heard of. We place this arrow in their quiver quite willingly as an item that ought not to be overlooked in any complete review of the case. How the editorial paragraph has so long eluded notice we cannot comprehend.

Assuming John Hay to have been the author of the Bixby letter, one wonders why he never even whispered the fact to any of his children. We are not the only questors who have sought information from them. Frankly and graciously they have told us, as they many times have told others, that they recall no mention whatever of his claim. Of course, they might be proud to affirm his authorship if they were aware of any grounds for their doing so. The letter had become famous long before their father passed away, and one would have supposed he might have entrusted the secret to them.

There is still another witness who has not been named publicly, so far as we know, and our information in this instance is not supported by any written statement. The late Louis A. Coolidge of Boston was a Washington correspondent from 1891 to 1904, and during the year preceding the death of Mr. Hay he was literary director of the Republican National Committee. The source of his information we can only conjecture, but he emphatically told one person, who in

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turn told us, that President Lincoln had nothing to do with the Bixby letter. This item also we freely convey to those with whose views we disagree.

THIRD-HAND EVIDENCE

Of the two men whom Mr. Wakefield and Mr. Barbee heavily rely upon for more direct testimony, one offers evidence which Mr. Barbee rightly describes as "third-hand." It is, indeed, not only third-hand but third-rate, as the telling of the story will show.

In 1910 Edward Verrall Lucas, the English essayist and anthologist, published a volume containing more than one hundred and fifty letters of varying lengths, most of them amusing, written by persons of very diverse characters and abilities. The last letter in this little volume, which he called *The Second Post*, was the Bixby letter, printed under the title "Abraham Lincoln Comforts a Mother."⁹⁵ After twenty-four years Mr. Lucas put out another book containing letters in whole or in part, with the title *Post-Bag Diversions*. The compiler announces that these letters were "elicited" by him, as most of them were in comment upon the contents of the earlier work. Among them is a letter from a clergyman, the Rev. G. A. Jackson, containing the following account of the American President's letter of condolence:

". . . When re-reading the other day your *Second Post* I was reminded of what I was once told about Lincoln's letter to the bereaved mother . . . When I lived at Knebworth, Cora, Lady Strafford—an American—occupied for a time Knebworth House, Lord Lytton's place, and the late Mr. Page, the American

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ambassador, used to spend weekends there. On one occasion, Lady Strafford told me, he noticed a copy—framed, I think—of Lincoln's letter and asked her if she knew the true history of it. He then related that John Hay had told him that when the news of the mother's bereavement was given to Lincoln he instructed Hay to write a suitable reply of condolence. This Hay did, and handed it to Lincoln. Lincoln was so surprised that Hay had so perfectly captured his style of composition that he had the letter exactly as Hay wrote it sent to the mother as coming from himself.

“That is Mr. Page's story to Lady Strafford of Lincoln's famous letter, and I suppose that he was a man who knew what he was talking about; nor do I suppose that Hay was the man to say what was untrue. I feel sure that I have given this as Lady Strafford gave it to me, and as she is still in the land of the living she can corroborate it if the matter interests you sufficiently. Perhaps, however, the story is already familiar to you and I have needlessly troubled you to read all this.

“By the way, if ever you bring out another series of letters can you include St. Paul's Epistle to Philemon? Perfect in its way—and no copyright difficulties.”⁹⁶

Mr. Lucas' only comment was to print: “St. Paul's Epistle is accessible to all, but here is the text of the Lincoln letter,” and so for the second time he gave his readers the message to Mrs. Bixby.

Now all these are honorable persons, but the evidence is third rate because it has passed through so many mouths and ears. John Hay tells Walter Page, and

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Mr. Page tells Lady Strafford, and Lady Strafford tells Mr. Jackson, and Mr. Jackson tells Mr. Lucas. It might be called fourth-rate testimony. John Hay communicates the secret to Mr. Page some time before July, 1905. Page was ambassador to England from 1913 through most of 1918 and he died at the end of that year. Mr. Jackson wrote his letter to Lucas on January 16, 1922. The book was published in 1934. The contemplation of these dates does not induce confidence in the details of the Jackson record. Memory is a fuzzy, treacherous thing, as every competent historian will certify. We ourselves place no high value on this story.

PRESIDENT BUTLER'S STATEMENT

The witness on whom those who promote the theory that John Hay wrote our letter depend in the main is the former president of Columbia University. The eminence of Dr. Butler compels careful and respectful attention to his account of the foundation for his position. We shall find his statement in the volume of recollections which we have noticed heretofore. It is correctly quoted by Mr. Wakefield. We are told how much Theodore Roosevelt admired the letter, and that he caused a framed photograph to be hung in a guest room in the White House. Also how John Morley occupied the room in 1904, saw the letter for the first time, and "admired it greatly." And then one morning he called on the Secretary of State, John Hay, who listened "with a quizzical look upon his face" to Morley's expressions of admiration for the letter. There was silence for a little while, and then "John

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Hay told Morley that he had himself written the Bixby letter, and that this was the reason why it could not be found among Lincoln's papers, and why no original copy of it had ever been forthcoming." This must be confidential until after Hay's death. And Morley told the story to no one until July 9, 1912, when he related it to Dr. Butler in London, exacting in turn a pledge to keep the secret until Mr. Morley should have passed away.⁹⁷

Again we are thinking about honorable men whose memories may be fallible. Hay tells why no copy could be found in the President's papers, and Chaplain Neill states that Lincoln kept "no formal letter book." The well-known English statesman includes in his *Recollections* an account of his sojourn at the White House, covering apparently the week of November 9 to 16, 1904.⁹⁸ In correspondence Dr. Butler has told us, in fixing the time of Morley's talk with Hay, that it "was immediately after election day in 1904," and that he and Morley had been speaking together at the Carnegie Institute at Pittsburgh on the preceding Saturday.

We looked up the dates, of course. The election was on November 8. The preceding Saturday was November 5. They did not speak that day in Pittsburgh. They did speak on Thursday, November 3, but not "together at the Carnegie Institution." That was Founder's Day, and the speakers were John Morley and Seth Low, who had left the presidency of Columbia University in 1901. President Butler was not called upon to speak inasmuch as he was down for an address at the annual banquet of the Chamber of Commerce that evening. He did appear there as the principal speaker but the

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name of John Morley was not found in the list. These seemingly small matters show how slippery are details even in excellent memories.

In this connection we notice how guarded the editor of the *Westminster Gazette* was in a letter to us thirteen years after the date of the letter heretofore quoted. In 1941 he wrote that he could not remember how he first heard the story of Hay and the Bixby letter. "Certainly not from John Hay himself," he said, "but possibly from Lord Morley, who was an intimate friend of many years." Nor did he "get it from either Whitelaw Reid or Page." And, he said: "Hay was a very punctilious man and it was unlike him to claim the authorship of anything that he wrote on behalf of his chief, but he may have let a word slip in private talk with an English friend. But the whole story may be founded on Hay's known accomplishment as a writer and somebody's suggestion that the Bixby letter is not in Lincoln's style." With this we agree in part. Somebody has misunderstood somebody else. But John Hay stood on his own feet as a writer and did not ape even Lincoln, so far as any known evidence would demonstrate, and the Bixby letter is in Lincoln's style, couched in the lofty measures which set the Gettysburg Speech and the 1865 Inaugural apart in a class by themselves.

Opportunity for error is inherent in the sources which have come to hand. Dr. Butler reports what Mr. Morley said John Hay said. We have called attention to Dr. Butler's letter to Professor Basler, telling him that Robert T. Lincoln had told how John Hay was

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accustomed to write the President's nonpolitical letters, and we have pointed out Robert Lincoln's liability to error. In a note to Mr. Barbee the President of Columbia University said in 1943: "My only two authorities were Robert Lincoln and John Hay."⁹⁹ In his book Dr. Butler recalls Mr. Lincoln's opinion that the Bixby "facsimiles" were forgeries. We have not found any direct connection between Mr. Hay and President Butler. It was through Viscount Morley that he became acquainted with the alleged claim of President Lincoln's former secretary to the authorship of the Bixby letter. The British statesman did spend a week in the White House in November, 1904. He had been, he recorded in his *Recollections*, "at Chicago on the day of the polling for the President when Mr. Roosevelt won his famous landslide victory." He then had traveled to Washington to become "the guest of the conquering hero." When soon afterward he boarded the boat for the voyage home he confided to the reporters that the "two things" which had impressed him most in America were "the President and Niagara Rapids." His narrative contains nothing about John Hay.

Any simple recital of the few known facts is enough to indicate that there were not only "a" chance, but many chances for error in the transmission of the account of what our Secretary of State told the British statesman. Morley had his chat with Hay in November, 1904. He imparted his information to Butler in July, 1912. Dr. Butler published his account of what Morley said in 1940. It is well also to bear in mind that such a trained and careful writer as John A. Spender was

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sure only that he did not hear the story from Hay, Reid, or Page. With becoming caution he said that the only source he could think of was Morley.

During the last full year of his service in the cabinet of Theodore Roosevelt, Hay resumed the making of notes in the form of a diary. There are entries for the days that Morley was lodged in the White House. The President asked him to invite the distinguished visitor to dinner. The time was too short to arrange for "a party," and only a few were present. Morley "talked very interestingly" about the political situation in England. This was on the evening of November 12, 1904.

JOHN HAY'S BURDEN OF GRIEF

On that same evening John Hay's older brother passed away. "My brother Leonard died last night at Warsaw [Illinois]" is the opening sentence in the brief entry in the diary for November 13. The younger man, who knew well that he was himself far on the downward arc, was profoundly moved by this loss. The closing sentence in his notes for that day is: "He was my earliest and my best friend." Instead of any account of his activities on the sixteenth, the diary contains a letter to his friend, the President, which may be read in the opening chapter of the first volume of Thayer's biography of Hay. To "dear Theodore" he wrote: "I cannot talk about it—so I will write you a word. . . . He was always my standard. . . . He made many sacrifices for me. . . . He fought my battles. . . . He was my superior in every way but one—the gift of expression. His scholarship was more exact than mine. . . .

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He was the chief of my tribe, in birth as well as in mind and character. . . ." He began the lovely letter by alluding to his brother as "my first friend and my best," and at the end he said: "I feel remorsefully unworthy of him." He lamented his inability to be present at the funeral. Even an indifferent reader will feel that the writer was sorely stricken by the loss of the brother whom he looked back upon as a hero and a protector. He did what only the Secretary himself could do of his departmental duties in the days that followed, and sent others to represent him at some functions.

We have lingered upon these details because they are distinctly pertinent to our inquiry. The President's guest called upon John Hay just when he was most heavily burdened with grief. We have no information as to how many times Morley may have visited Hay during his few days at the White House. Without comment we now submit in full what the diarist wrote which bears upon our subject, for Sunday, November 13, 1904:

"My brother Leonard died last night at Warsaw. John Morley came in a few minutes after I had received the telegram from my sister. I talked with him hardly knowing what I was saying, until the President came in—and then there was no need of any talking. . . . He was my earliest and my best friend."

We regard John Hay as a man of integrity. A Tammany politician might deceive the people about public matters in the way Dr. Butler indicates that Hay did, but we doubt if many professionals of that ilk would appropriate the authorship of a personal letter of condolence "knowing perfectly well" that he

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was stealing what another man had composed. Even if we were to go so far as to accept the most sinister interpretation of Hay's words in the letter to Nicolay which we have quoted—that in writing their *History* they “ought to . . . tell the truth about everything . . . with one exception. We are Lincoln men all through”—we by no means are warranted thereby in charging him with outright and outrageous falsehood with regard to such a personal message of comfort as that to Mrs. Bixby. We do not accept any such interpretation. We think that somewhere along the line a mistake was made.

JOHN HAY AND RICHARD WATSON GILDER

Was John Hay capable of treachery in his dealings with a dear and intimate friend? The question is by no means academic. Its answer bears definitely upon our inquiry. The case in point concerns his relations with Richard Watson Gilder. In his biography of Hay, Thayer tells of their “rasping” over matters involved in their relations as author and editor. And he adds: “But when the rasping was over, it left no scars. He [Hay] and Gilder remained fast friends through life.”¹⁰⁰

Gilder's name is associated with that period, which now seems so far away, when American magazines stood for high literary standards and for such beauty of illustration as the country had not known before, and perhaps never since. For nearly thirty years he edited *The Century*, and he was besides a poet and an essayist, and a citizen with noble ideals of public service. In *The Century* the Nicolay and Hay *History* appeared

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in monthly installments for nearly four years, and scores besides of articles and poems about Abraham Lincoln. The editor himself was a devoted Lincolnian and wrote many of the finest things ever published about the Man and the President in both prose and verse. Hay and Gilder joked one another and jabbed one another, understood and appreciated each other; they were friends.

It happened that one evening we were looking over the first volume of the Gettysburg Edition of the *Complete Works* of Lincoln, and we noticed that, as a general introduction for the set of volumes, the publisher had used Richard Watson Gilder's familiar essay on *Lincoln as a Writer*. The copyright date for the set is 1905. The article carried the copyright date of 1901. The essay ends with the quotation in full of the letter to Mrs. Bixby with a most beautiful passage in its praise. The writer used the letter as the climax of his essay, saying that "it may well be associated with the Gettysburg Address," and followed it with these lofty sentences:

"This letter of consolation in its simplicity and fitness again recalls the Greek spirit. It is like one of those calm monuments of grief which the traveler may still behold in that small cemetery under the deep Athenian sky, where those who have been dead so many centuries are kept alive in the memories of men by an art which is immortal."¹⁰¹

The copyright dates bothered us. We looked over a book that all Lincoln lovers know, entitled *Lincoln the Leader*, which contains the essay so named, and the essay on *Lincoln as a Writer*, with an altered title.

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It appears here as *Lincoln's Genius for Expression*. The two are identical. But the copyright date of this book is 1909, and in the first volume of the *Complete Works* this essay is dated for copyright 1901. Where in that year had it ever been given to the public? Memory at length came to our rescue. We found on our shelves a very small volume, carrying the title, *Lincoln Passages from his Speeches and Letters*, with an "introduction" by Richard Watson Gilder. And there at the front was the essay, the text in full, with the final passage which we have quoted, and our letter, and at the end of the anthology were the letter again and the Second Inaugural Address. We turned to the title page. It bore the Roman numerals MCMI.

We were by this time intensely interested. *Lincoln the Leader* had been published four years after John Hay's death. He had passed away on the first day of July, 1905. Whether the *Complete Works*, published in that year, came before or after Hay's departure we could not readily ascertain. But surely he must have known of his friend's little book, with thirty-seven Lincoln selections, and Gilder's essay at the front. We took down our copy of Gilder's *Letters*, and quickly verified our guess. On October 26, 1901, Gilder wrote this letter to John Hay, Secretary of State:

"It was interesting to me and very delightful to see that the two monosyllables, John Hay, were all that were needed in the announcement at Yale the other day.

"I am sending you herewith the 'Thumb-Nail' collection of passages from the speeches and letters of Lincoln. Mr. Benjamin E. Smith, of our Dictionary

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department, made the collection, and your diffident friend the introduction. This is how it happened: When your and Nicolay's book of the complete writings of Lincoln was running through the press I had to make a talk a few times and used to take those sheets along and read from them, and talk between. This got to be finally a sort of lecture. The company hearing of this got me to boil it down as a preface. There is perhaps one idea in it not hackneyed, and that is a musical idea. If you ever have time to look through the preface this theory may amuse you—the theory of the *Leitmotif*.”¹⁰²

JOHN HAY WAS A GENTLEMAN

Can anybody reasonably doubt that John Hay looked over his friend's little book? Or that he examined the “introduction” and thought over the idea of the *Leitmotif*? Or that he noticed the treatment of the Bixby letter at the end of the essay, and the sentiments so beautifully expressed in the final paragraph?

Is it conceivable that if John Hay had been the author of this letter wrongly attributed to Lincoln he would have allowed Gilder to remain for four years in ignorance of the truth, and meantime would have told such less intimate friends as Walter Hines Page, John Morley, and William C. Brownell that he had himself composed this message of condolence which Gilder was extolling as a masterpiece of art? A line by mail would have put the facts straight, and during those four years the two men were probably in personal contact occasionally. The assumption is sustained by the record that Hay had the Gilders, husband and wife, at his

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home once for tea and again for luncheon, in May,
1904. As a friend and an honest man Hay would have
made the truth known to Gilder.

It is not necessary to labor the argument. One
simple sentence amply answers all doubts:

John Hay was a gentleman.

THE LETTER IS "GENUINE" SAID HAY

In his reply to our inquiry for the authority on
which the *Times* based its verdict as to the writing of
our letter, Mr. Ogden said, as we have seen, that he
knew "of no scrap of documentary evidence" that
would tend to substantiate a final judgment on the
question. So far as we know, there is only one such
"scrap" in existence, and it is of vastly more impor-
tance than are the stray bits of writing to which that
word is commonly applied. It is a direct statement by
John Hay himself which we consider a more than
sufficient offset to the reports, unsupported by docu-
ments, which are relied upon by those who stand for
his authorship. We quote it here from the facsimile at
the front of this volume, and go on to explain why we
accept it as authentic testimony of the first value.

"Department of State

Washington

January 19, 1904

Dear Mr. Chandler:—

*The letter of Mr. Lincoln to Mrs. Bixby is genu-
ine, is printed in our edition of his Works, and has
been frequently re-published; but the engraved copy
of Mr. Lincoln's alleged manuscript, which is ex-*

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tensively sold, is, in my opinion, a very ingenious forgery.

Yours faithfully

John Hay.

Hon. William E. Chandler

Spanish Claims Commission."

Below this note, in another hand, are these lines :

*"Aug. 6, 1909—gave original of above
to W. D. Chandler."*

Such a "scrap" of testimony naturally induces a volley of questions. "How and where did we find this letter?" Just through one of those intuitive flashes known as a hunch. In 1926 Nathaniel Wright Stephenson published the compilation of the personal portions of the letters, speeches and conversations of the Civil War President, arranged so as to form what he described as *An Autobiography of Abraham Lincoln*. At the foot of the page on which are the last lines of the Bixby letter this note may be found: "With regard to this letter there is a curious confusion. The files of the War Department do not corroborate its facts. Its authenticity has been challenged. It was included in the collection of Nicolay and Hay, who ardently believed it genuine."¹⁰³ Those final words jerked us forward in our chair. How did Stephenson know that Lincoln's former secretaries "ardently believed" the "challenged" letter to be "genuine"? We wrote the compiler. In a few days there came back a most courteous note, dated November 24, 1926, stating that he had "turned up" Hay's note "while pursuing an entirely different subject among the papers of Senator Chandler of New

Department of State
Washington

January 19 1904

Dear Mr. Chandler:

The letter of Mr. Lincoln to Mrs. Bixby is genuine, is printed in our edition of his Works, and has been frequently re-published; but the engraved copy of Mr. Lincoln's alleged manuscript, which is extensively sold, is, in my opinion, a very ingenious forgery.

Yours faithfully

John Hay.

Hon. William E. Chandler
Spanish Claims Commission

Aug 6 1909 - gave original of above
to W. E. Chandler

John Hay's note of January 19, 1904, to
William E. Chandler, with Mr. Chandler's
notation below.

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Hampshire," and he sent later a typed copy of the note. He had found it in the Chandler Collection in the New Hampshire Historical Society in Concord.

And there we found it in 1941. It had been somehow overlooked by Chandler's biographer, but there it was, in exactly the right place in the files.

Now William E. Chandler, whose lifelong home was in Concord, had been active in political life from the Fremont campaign of 1856 until the second election of Woodrow Wilson in 1916. He had a career of distinction in his own state, and became in turn secretary of the navy, a United States senator, and the president of the Spanish Claims Commission. He was a party man who many times departed from the official policies in his party. In the preparation of his huge, definitive life of the man, Professor Leon Burr Richardson, of Dartmouth College, examined, among other sources, "The Chandler papers, divided between the Library of Congress and the New Hampshire Historical Society, numbering perhaps 80,000 items."

The line at the bottom of our facsimile is unquestionably in the handwriting of the man whose name appears just above it, "Hon. William E. Chandler." We say this on the authority of three excellent witnesses. The late Director of the New Hampshire Historical Society, Major Otis G. Hammond, looked at the line and said instantly, "Chandler wrote that." Associate Justice Elwin L. Page of the Supreme Court of New Hampshire, also identifies it. Professor Richardson says that "Chandler's handwriting is unmistakable."

The line thus certified indicates, however, that the

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original of the John Hay note does not appear in our facsimile. William E. Chandler says that on "Aug. 6, 1909" he "gave" that original to W. D. Chandler, who was his son. That son has now passed away, but *his* son is of the opinion that this "original" must be in the Historical Society or in the Library of Congress. It can not be found in Concord, nor could the Chief of the Manuscripts Division of the Congressional Library, or Mr. Justice Wilkins of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, find it in the Chandler files for 1904.

What value then has this alleged copy for our inquiry? The men who knew Chandler agree that when he signed a paper his signature was a guarantee of its correctness. Major Hammond says: "I am decidedly of the opinion that even if this letter is a copy it is as good, with the Chandler note, as the original would be." And Professor Richardson writes: "I think it may be taken for a certainty that the copy in the Historical Society is a correct copy." Also Mr. Justice Page states: "I should trust its correctness absolutely. Of course, W. E. C. had no motive to copy incorrectly. He was one who regarded correctness. He might say to me something in round numbers, but when he said it, was sure to qualify it, as 'say \$1,000,000.' The first time he ever said that to me, he was even careful to tell me what 'say' meant. I think he had a great love of accuracy." Mr. Page has handled a great many Chandler papers.

We feel that our document has thus been qualified as an authority. Who wrote the copy, which Mr. Chandler vouches for as made from a John Hay original, is not easy to ascertain, but it is assumed to have

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been done by a copyist in the offices of the Spanish Claims Commission. The note, it will have been observed, is a simple, definite, single sentence.

Let it also be noticed that it was written in the same year with the visit of John Morley to the White House and his talk with John Hay. Here we may indulge properly enough in speculation. In that same year Louis A. Coolidge, who had been since 1891 a Washington correspondent, became the director of the Republican National Committee for the Theodore Roosevelt campaign. We have mentioned his assertion that Lincoln did not write the Bixby letter. Was gossip to that effect afloat in Washington in that year? Is there any significance in the fact that it was in 1904 that Tobin took out another copyright on his "facsimile," although the first copyright still had fifteen years to run?

If the story that John Hay had written our letter was passed around among the elect at the Capital in that year there is no risk in saying that William E. Chandler would hear about it. Louis A. Coolidge may have told him; this of course is speculation, and many other guesses would be about as good. Coolidge, however, was close enough to Chandler to have been considered long ago for the writing of his biography. While Chandler was indeed a wasp, his friends knew that there was a deep stratum of sentiment in his nature. One who knew him well describes his admiration for Abraham Lincoln as amounting almost to idolatry. It is not to be doubted that if and when he learned of the Bixby letter story he would go at once to headquarters for information. That was his way of doing things. An entry in

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Hay's *Diary* of November 19, 1904, indicates how correct were the official relations of the head of the Department of State and the president of the Spanish Claims Commission. As leaders in the political party to which both were devoted they probably knew each other well. The diarist recorded that "W. E. C. told me this morning that the wife of our ambassador in Madrid" had communicated an item of information, which may have been important or may have been only a bit of gossip. The punctilious Chandler passed it on to the Department as a matter of duty.

It is inconceivable that such a man as Chandler would have taken no pains for the preservation of John Hay's reply to his inquiry about the Lincoln letter. What he did was characteristic. He did not leave it in the enormous mass of his papers. He had a copy made and placed upon it a note about his disposition of the original. He then gave the original to his son as something of special value.

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WHAT did John Hay mean when he went on record with the statement that "the letter of Mr. Lincoln to Mrs. Bixby is genuine"? A letter is "genuine" when it is not spurious, not counterfeit, when it is written by the person whose name it bears. The secretary of state used that word advisedly in writing to the head of an important federal commission in Washington. He knew well just how his words would be understood by his correspondent. He deliberately affirmed Abraham Lincoln's authorship of the document. He used no ambiguous terms anywhere in his terse factual reply to a man whom he knew and who may have been a personal friend. Of the word he used only one interpretation is possible.

In the second clause of this note Secretary Hay added that the letter in question "is printed in our Edition of his [Lincoln's] Works." By the pronoun "our" he joined the guarantee of President Lincoln's senior secretary, John G. Nicolay, with his own affirmation of Lincoln's authorship. Their edition of Lincoln's *Works* was published in 1894, thirty years after the date of the Bixby letter, and ten years before Hay had occasion to reply to William E. Chandler's inquiry. Not one, but both of Lincoln's secretaries

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were responsible for all that was included in their compilation of Lincoln's writings and addresses, and it was by invitation of Robert T. Lincoln that they undertook the task. The two men must have been in constant consultation, and Nicolay, in any event, would not have consented to the appearance of any item in their compilation against which he had any reason to suppose any charge of doubtful origin could be directed. He knew the story of the Bixby letter. It went into the collection with his consent and approval as a genuine Lincoln document. As a matter of fact, no paper of any kind which they admitted to their edition of the *Works* of their great comrade has ever been found to be spurious, or of a doubtful character—which is something that can not be said of the Gettysburg Edition, with the production of which they had only a minor, if any, connection. Nor can that claim be made for the supplementary collection prepared by Gilbert A. Tracy, nor for the miscellaneous collection assembled by Emanuel Hertz in the second volume of his *Abraham Lincoln, A New Portrait*.

We may be reminded of the possibility that Hay did not use the word "genuine" in the sense in which it would naturally have been understood by Chandler. What if the demand be made that we shall show just what, in his own mind, the secretary of state meant by the term he employed, regardless of the definitions of the lexicographers. It is rather a shifty expedient, and we doubt that Hay would resort to it.

WHAT JOHN HAY MEANT BY "GENUINE"

We are prepared, however, to furnish competent evidence on that point. On June 2, 1903, Secretary

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Hay received a letter of inquiry from Mrs. Laura C. Langford. She was asking about two Lincoln letters, dated respectively October 21, 1862, and September 11, 1863; also about a "circular letter" of July 3, 1862. All were included in the Nicolay and Hay edition of Lincoln's *Works*, Hay reminded her. The last mentioned was sent to various governors and had to do with the raising of troops. The first named, also dealing with military matters, was addressed to General McClellan and signed by General Halleck. That of September 11, 1863, signed by the President and addressed to Governor Andrew Johnson, was concerned with the establishment of a loyal state government in Tennessee, and was of high importance. In his reply, dated June 4, Hay said:

"I have received your letter of the 2nd, and return the two letters by Mr. Lincoln, which you enclosed. I am sorry to say I cannot tell you who wrote the manuscript. The signatures, of course, are genuine, but the body of the letters was written by one of the clerks in the White House. It was not Mr. Nicolay or myself. The letters you referred to, September 11, 1863, and October 21, 1862, are printed in the 'Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln,' by Nicolay and Hay. The letter of the 3rd of July, 1862, was a circular letter, also printed in the 'Complete Works.' " This is not the entire letter, but it is all we have.¹⁰⁴ Both the letters signed by the President have the Lincolnian ring, but we do not now discuss that, as not pertinent to the present purpose.

Our point is that Hay in this letter tells us his definition of "genuine." A letter written by a White House clerk and signed by Lincoln is "genuine." The

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clerk may have taken it by dictation, the President may have corrected a letter written by the clerk, the President may have outlined or in any other way have drafted a letter and the clerk may have copied it for the President to sign. In any case the signature would make it Lincoln's own. The clerk in any of the alternatives could say, by the way, that he "wrote" the letter; but when the President appended his signature, even though the letter had been composed entirely by a clerk, it became a "genuine" Lincoln letter. The responsibility he thus accepted, the sentiments he thereby adopted, the statement of policy he then affirmed, and so through the whole gamut of White House correspondence. Hay makes it clear that Lincoln approved what the clerk wrote, and made the writing his own by signing the paper. The question of composition must be determined on other grounds.

Instances are lacking which would allow anyone to work out any generalizations as to the methods by which the President conducted these office matters. He was not a methodical man. When he was aroused over any public question of high importance, he worked hard over the preparation of a suitable and effective statement. As a rule he cogitated first, and then wrote with fair rapidity. Even when he wrote a second time, and then rewrote three times more, the Gettysburg Address, his alterations were slight, although they contributed to the perfection of the document. On a Sunday he sent for Commissioner Barrett of the Pensions Bureau. On arrival, the commissioner found the President "in his office with scattered pieces of manuscript before him, out of which he was making

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up his noted letter to Mr. Hodges, which bears the date of April 4, 1864.”¹⁰⁵

A word which Hay often used somewhat loosely does not occur in the note to Chandler. That word is “wrote.” Professor Basler has rightly called attention to the ease with which the private secretary might have been misconstrued at times through his ambiguous use of that term. “I wrote the speech and sent it to Hanscum,” he recorded in his Diary on a time. Separated from the context a reader would understand that he had composed a speech, whereas he meant that he had written out what Lincoln had said in response to a serenade on November 9, 1864, and had sent the text to a newspaper man.¹⁰⁶ In the account of Viscount Morley’s visit with Hay, as given in Dr. Butler’s book, the secretary of state tells Morley that “he had himself written the Bixby letter.” If he used that precise language his visitor must have taken his meaning to be that he had composed the letter. Of that conversation no details are known. Yet Hay, who did not use words in ordinary intercourse with the exactitude of William E. Chandler, might have employed the term in various ways. Any secretary might “write” a letter from dictation, or copy a letter, as all Lincoln’s secretaries were frequently directed to do; or compose a letter and refer it back to their superior for correction or revision.

So far as we know, John Hay never claimed the knack of perfect imitation either of the President’s signature, or of his handwriting. Letters are known which the junior secretary wrote for Lincoln, and which the President signed, in which “corrections and

Abraham Lincoln & the Widow Bixby emendations written in by Lincoln," are plainly visible. Professor Basler points out a supposed instance in which the secretary who could so "admirably" imitate Lincoln's chirography, did a most clumsy job. On October 10, 1864, the President wrote a letter to Henry W. Hoffman, which was important as containing his views respecting the proposed new Constitution for Maryland, and his wish that it should "provide for the extinction of slavery." At one point Lincoln used the homely colloquialism "better posted." The handy secretary, impertinently as it seems to us, substituted the word "informed" for "posted." The manuscript, which Mr. Basler has examined, shows clearly what Hay had done. The secretary mentions the change in his *Diary*.¹⁰⁷

The incident illustrates a marked difference between the ways those two men expressed themselves in writing. Lincoln used as few words as possible. He always was intent on making his meaning plain to the "common people," of whom, as he said, "the Lord had made so many." Hay was prone to conventional phrasing and fine writing.

THE UNTRIED YOUNG MAN OF 1864

Gifted and versatile though John Hay was, we do not think that the young man, twenty-six years old in 1864, could have written the letter to Mrs. Bixby. He had not suffered enough. He could not, and did not, feel the burden of the fratricidal conflict as did the man who suffered with and for the people of both the South and the North. The latest of Hay's biographers, writing with care and insight, has stressed the fact, over-

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looked by others, that not until 1901 did he go "out to meet adversity, hitherto to him a stranger. . . . For more than 62 years," he says, "John Hay had escaped the kind of personal misfortune which tries man's soul. He had complained much about little troubles, more than he now complained about real ones, but it was not until 1901 that he had to pass through the fiery furnace." In the biographer's opinion, it was "party loyalty" that "held Hay in office" in 1904, and he "staggered on until after the inauguration in March, 1905, and then fell under his load."¹⁰⁸

The younger man was devoted to his friend the President. Lincoln had lost an infant son in Illinois, and had mentioned that loss in his farewell to his neighbors in Springfield. Another son had died in the White House, and the daughter of Edward Everett, in a letter to her father, had told how the President had "sobbed audibly" during the funeral services.¹⁰⁹ Lincoln had explored depths and climbed heights as yet unknown to his light-hearted junior secretary. An attentive reader of John Hay's *Diary*, with its attractive style, shrewd observations, and clever characterizations, and also with its allusions to his somewhat Bohemian habits in Washington and the account of the convivial "night before" in Gettysburg, is likely to feel that while he was well started "on the way" he had not yet "arrived."

Several witnesses not heretofore cited have full right to be heard in this discussion. Miss Helen Nicolay, the daughter of Lincoln's senior secretary, does not believe that her father's intimate associate in the White House and in after years wrote our letter. Charles Moore, who devoted more than forty years to the development of

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the Capital, and who served some time as chairman of the National Fine Arts Commission, informed us that he consulted with his friend, Robert T. Lincoln, "at the time arrangements were being made for the transfer of the Lincoln papers to the Library of Congress. No question as to the authenticity of the Bixby letter itself or that President Lincoln composed it was in Robert Lincoln's mind. He was convinced, however, that the facsimile was made by some one who was able to reproduce an excellent semblance of his father's handwriting. A critical examination, however, revealed marked, although minor discrepancies." Mr. Frederic N. Towers, an attorney in Washington and a one-time secretary of Robert Lincoln, in a letter written in 1925, referred thus to the Bixby letter: "Mr. Lincoln . . . does not wish to be drawn into a controversy or dispute as to the origin or authorship of the letter; but, I am sure, himself feels that there can be no question but that his father wrote it." *

We have alluded previously to the statements of the children of John Hay. We have letters from the husband of one of his daughters, from the secretary of another daughter, and from his son, all frankly saying that their father never had mentioned to them this matter of the authorship of the Bixby letter. And—what is extremely suggestive—we have a letter from John Hay's biographer, Dr. Tyler Dennett, in which he wrote that he was "of the opinion that John Hay could have drafted" the letter, but he ended by saying that "on the other side of the question is the fact that while the subject seems to have been not infrequently

* For a brief discussion of these matters see the Supplementary note, numbered 119.

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discussed in the Hay family circles, and while Hay is not remembered by members of his family ever to have denied the authorship, it seems not to have been remembered by anyone except John Morley that he ever claimed it." And, wrote Dr. Dennett: "I do not regard the Butler-Morley statement as conclusive. Perhaps it is one of those speculative questions on which we shall never have proof."

We here record our own opinion that the Page-Strafford-Jackson-Lucas testimony is not of value, and that the Hay-Brownell-Ogden testimony is no more conclusive than the Hay-Morley-Butler testimony. All these are honorable persons—but somewhere there are mistakes in this evidence.

QUESTIONS OF STYLE

When John Hay returned to Illinois after his graduation from Brown University, he was "saturated," it has been said, and the word was used advisedly, by the idea that literature should be his profession.¹¹⁰ His class day poem had been heard with delight by a discriminating audience. Here was a rare young man. Toward the end of his college career, he had been admitted to a small circle of writers and readers who revolved around Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman, the "Helen" of Edgar Allan Poe's poem. The young collegian regarded her "with a kind of sacred awe."¹¹¹ She expressed an interest in his verses. Perhaps she patronized him a little.

And then he had to return to "the barbarous West." In the long months of uncertainty and melancholy that ensued, he saw little of worth in the life of the prairies.

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He put his feelings on paper, and sent them off to Mrs. Whitman. In his letters he tried hard to reach the lofty plateau on which she dwelt. The letters were sincere, no doubt, but they were overloaded with rhetoric, as a few quotations will show. He described himself as "an exile in the West." He feared that he would "entirely lose all the aspirations . . . formerly cherished." "Under the influence of the Boeotian atmosphere," he wrote, "my spirit will be subdued to what it works in, and my residence in the East will remain in memory an oasis in the desert stretch of a material life." He longed for "Providence and civilization." Also he recorded that he "felt the deprivation keenly in the Fall when the woods were blazing with the Autumnal transfiguration and the nights slept tranced in the love of the harvest moon."¹¹²

The "exile" also exchanged letters, verses, and criticisms with Miss Nora Perry, a member of the Whitman group. On March 4, 1860, he wrote her: "I feel for a moment as a pilgrim might have felt, in the days when angels walked with men, who, lying weary and exhausted with his toilsome journey, has heard in the desert silence faint hints of celestial melody, and seen the desert sands empurpled and glorified with a fleeting flash of spiritual wings."¹¹³ The poetic spirit lurks in his prose, but spontaneity is lacking.

For a year Hay had been reading law in Springfield with his uncle, Stephen T. Logan, and next door was the office occupied by Abe Lincoln and Billy Herndon. Lincoln at that time had passed his fiftieth birthday. He had astonished the nation by the power of his attack on Stephen A. Douglas. He was rising fast as a

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public man. The young student could hardly at that time appreciate the eloquent simplicity of Lincoln's speeches. Four years later he did not appreciate the Gettysburg Address. He did fall under the spell of that unique personality, and he did not miss the opportunity of his lifetime when John G. Nicolay induced the President-elect to "let Hay come along" to Washington.

It was in July, 1861, that his first published essay appeared anonymously in *The Atlantic Monthly*. It was a tribute to Ellsworth of the Zouaves.

Let us notice a few samples of its style. At the outset: "The beginnings of great periods have often been marked and made memorable by striking events. Out of the cloud that hangs around the vague inceptions of revolutions, a startling incident will sometimes flash like lightning, to show that the warring elements have begun their work." He describes his man: the head "statuesquely poised, and crowned with a luxuriance of curling black hair." The "hazel eye, bright, though serene, the eye of a gentleman as well as a soldier." The nose "such as you see on Roman medals," "a light mustache just shading his lips, that were continually curving into the sunniest smiles. His voice, deep and musical, instantly attracted attention; and his address, though not without soldierly brusqueness, was sincere and courteous." At the end: "When the camp was silent, he began to work. . . . He finished his labor as the midnight stars were crossing the zenith. As he sat in his tent by the shore, it seems as if the mystical gales from the near eternity must have breathed for a moment over his soul, freighted with the odor of amaranths and asphodels." Then, "in the dewy light of the

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early dawn he occupied the first rebel town" and was shot as "he tore down the first rebel flag."¹¹⁴

Not a bad essay, in spite of many sophomoric touches. The organization is good and the ideas. But the style. Is there anything to indicate that after three years he would be writing in the exalted style of Lincoln as we find it in the most famous of his writings?

Nor in the years that followed the passing of his great comrade and friend do we find in John Hay's writings the qualities that Lincoln displayed when he was deeply moved. In Paris in 1866 he put in his *Diary* a portrait of Napoleon III, a remarkable piece of work. "In all his writing, Hay never did better than that," says Thayer.¹¹⁵ In Madrid in 1869 he described Castelar, the orator. The picture lives in a reader's memory.¹¹⁶ In 1871, when he had arrived at the age of thirty-three, his literary reputation was made. In that year he published *Castilian Days*, the chronicle of his life in Spain, and the poems that at once became enormously popular, "Jim Bludso, of the Prairie Belle," and "Little Breeches." It is not necessary to name others of his writings. In verse and prose, in many forms, he manifested his versatility. We are concerned with his years in the White House. He was twenty-two years of age when he began his secretaryship, and twenty-six when it ended. We study his *Diary*, read his published writings, try to understand the man, and raise the question: Could he have written the Bixby letter?

A HEIGHT JOHN HAY COULD NOT SCALE

One looks in vain, not only in the writings of the young man during the years of the war, but in all that

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John Hay is known at any time to have written, for traces of Lincoln's style. While in the White House the assistant private secretary wrote a few graceful poems, some pleasant letters, and a fascinating *Diary* packed with witticisms and shrewd observations. For an example of Hay in the full tide of his literary powers, however, we must come down the years a long way. In 1891 he went to the Rock Creek Cemetery to see the memorial which Henry Adams had commissioned Augustus St. Gaudens to design and erect for Mrs. Adams. In a letter written on the same day he set down his impressions. "The work is indescribably noble and imposing," he said. "It is, to my mind, St. Gaudens's masterpiece. It is full of poetry and suggestion. Infinite wisdom; a past without beginning and a future without end; a repose, after limitless experience; a peace, to which nothing matters—all embodied in this austere and beautiful face and form. . . ." ¹¹⁷ That stands for John Hay at his very best. He understood that creation of the sculptor's art which had baffled many cultivated critics, more than a few of whom had made themselves a nuisance to Henry Adams by demanding that he explain to them what it meant. Hay found words to express its meaning. The little passage is eloquent and beautiful. The contrast between the poetic prose of Lincoln and this passage is plain.

The quality of timelessness which Hay attributed to this memorial is characteristic of Lincoln's writing at *his* best. What is there of timelessness about the President's letter to the father and mother of the young commander of the Zouaves? Or in the letter to the young girl who mourned the death of her father? The letter to Mrs. Bixby is universal in its significance, and

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may ease the pain and uplift the hearts of war-stricken mothers in all generations.

In his years of intimate association with Lincoln the gifted young secretary had listened to two addresses which possess the emotional depth and beauty of expression which marked his utterances when he was profoundly moved—the goodbye to Springfield in 1861 and the dedication at Gettysburg in 1863. The John Hay who had grasped and stated the meaning of the Adams memorial would have been equally responsive to these addresses, but the John Hay of the 1860's was not. With these we group the Second Inaugural and the letter to the widow in Boston. The similarities in style cannot be missed—the measured flow of the lines, the cadence as of lyrics in prose, the nobility of sentiment and the simplicity of structure.

Lincoln could command at will the style of writing that would fit an occasion. He responded without delay to circumstances which required instant action. Could John Hay have composed the letter to Horace Greeley? That "letter" went over the wires to the editor of the *Tribune* as a telegram. It was written at white heat. The President was intensely moved. It is a masterly statement of his policy, in which every word counts and none can be spared.

We do not know, nor does anyone know, why there was an interval of twenty-three days between the removal of the Bixby papers from the files of the War Department by Secretary Stanton and the writing of the letter to Mrs. Bixby by President Lincoln. It would be idle to speculate about that matter, although it would not be difficult to offer suggestions. The word-

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ing of the letter provides an absolute answer to any idea that he delayed writing through indifference. Nor would it have been like Lincoln to delegate the writing of such a letter to John Hay or any other ghost writer.

Abraham Lincoln was almost, perhaps fully, at the summit of his powers when he wrote our letter. The man who had saved human lives whenever he could find an excuse for so doing—"slow to smite and swift to spare"—was rarely moved by the information which inspired it. Having indicated the source of his facts, he rose to the heights, and infused his prose with the poetic quality which gave the world an enduring masterpiece of extraordinary beauty. Read the letter aloud. Lincoln at times composed that way, testing words by their sound. There is the magic of a master in such sentences as these:

“. . . I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. . . . I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.”

We do not claim to have demonstrated absolutely that Abraham Lincoln composed our letter. We *do* claim that those who have challenged his authorship have fallen far short of demonstrating that he did not write it. We cast no aspersions upon anybody, whatever we may think of the temper of his writing, or the falli-

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bility of his arguments. We think that the burden of demonstration rests very heavily upon those who ascribe the composing of the Bixby letter to Mr. Hay. No better qualified judge in all such matters has our country known than the late Worthington C. Ford. We subscribe to the conclusion he printed in 1925, that our letter

*“. . . bears in every line the characteristic expression of Lincoln, which no man could imitate.”*¹¹⁸

NOTES

1. *The Bookman*, LV, 516–520, February, 1922.
2. *Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, XXVI, 149–170, January, 1945. For the quotations, 158, 149. The magazine is cited hereafter as *Tyler's*.
3. Goldwin Smith, *Reminiscences*, edited by Arnold Haultain, 321, 355.
4. *Tyler's*, 162.
5. *Ibid.*, 160, 169.
6. *Ibid.*, 157, 169.
7. Josiah Henry Benton, *Voting in the Field*: the entire volume, and especially the "Review and Summary," 306–322; for the quotation, 320.
8. Edward Stanwood, *A History of the Presidency from 1788 to 1897*, I, 307 f.
9. Not exactly pertinent, but interesting, is the account by W. P. Derby, in his *Bearing Arms in the 27th Massachusetts*, p. 399, of how at Millen, Georgia, the Confederates allowed a vote to be taken by Union prisoners, "professing to believe that if it was left to the soldiers McClellan would be elected President." The vote stood—McClellan 14, Lincoln 66.
10. The letter, with slightly imperfect text, may conveniently be found in John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Gettysburg edition, 6:287 f. This edition is hereafter cited as *Complete Works*. The text here used is that of the facsimile.
11. *Complete Works*, 8:152 f. The text here used is

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that of a facsimile in Sherman Day Wakefield's article in the February, 1939, issue of the magazine *Hobbies*.

12. William Schouler, *A History of Massachusetts in the Civil War*, I, 576-578. The publication date is 1868.
13. *Ibid.*, 578.
14. The items cited are in the National Archives in Washington.
15. From the records in the Massachusetts Military Archives in Boston.
16. Also in the National Archives.
17. *Tyler's*, 168 f.
18. Schouler, *History*, I, 578.
19. This is the text as it appeared in the *Boston Evening Transcript* on the day of the delivery of the letter to Mrs. Bixby. It will be noticed that it is divided into three paragraphs, that the name of the addressee is at the foot of the letter, and that the signature is "A. Lincoln." In the two-volume edition of Lincoln's *Complete Works*, edited by Nicolay and Hay, issued in 1894, the letter is printed in a single paragraph, addressed at the top to "Mrs. Bixby, Boston, Massachusetts," and the signature is "Abraham Lincoln." Also the title "Adjutant-General" is hyphenated and "heavenly" is not capitalized. In the Gettysburg edition, published in 1905, the letter may be found at p. 274 of Vol. 10. Here are other variations. There is no "Washington" in the dateline nor is the name of the addressee included in the text; it appears only in the title line above the text. Otherwise the text is identical with that in the 1894 edition, with a single paragraph, and the same signature. In both editions the word "freedom" is not capitalized. If comparison is made with any of the alleged "facsimiles" similar

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variations are recognized. In one of the most popular the preposition "to" does not follow "tendering," "republic" and "freedom" are not, and "Heavenly" is, capitalized, and the text is embodied in a single paragraph.

20. *Tyler's*, 169.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Not until later years did this newspaper shorten the spelling of its name to *Traveler*.
23. For this statement and the quotation, Schouler, *History*, I, 299-301.
24. Letter from Mr. Cross, June 1, 1945, who has a complete set of photostats of the documents.
25. Willard Goldthwaite Bixby and Eben Putnam, *A Genealogy of the Descendants of Joseph Bixby*, Part 3, p. 388.
26. William E. Barton, *A Beautiful Blunder*, 110-113.
27. Schouler, *History*. For the report, pp. 591-607; for the passage quoted, p. 606. The words "when in Congress" refer to the visit of Congressman Lincoln to Massachusetts in 1848.
28. Barton, 123 f.
29. The Bixby file in the Military Archives in the Massachusetts State House.
30. *War of the Rebellion Official Records*, Ser. 1, Vol. 19, Pt. 1, pp. 193, 204.
31. Schouler, *History*, 1:669.
32. *Bixby Genealogy*, Part 3:393 f.
33. *The Boston Herald*, August 3, 1925.
34. L. Vernon Briggs, *History and Genealogy of the Cabot Family*, 1:300 f.
35. Barton, 79.
36. *The New York Times*, August 6, 1925; photostats in possession of the author.

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37. Crosby has the letter at p. 331, Barrett at p. 832, Raymond at p. 616, Holland at p. 490, and Arnold at p. 681.
38. Barton, 50 ff.
39. *The New York Times*, August 4, 1925. Mr. Wakefield has noted differences as have various other investigators.
40. *The New York Tribune*, February 12, 1909; *The New York Times* of the same date; the *Columbia [University] Spectator*, February 15, 1909.
41. Nicolay and Hay, *Complete Works*, 1894 edition, 1:Preface, 2:600; Gettysburg edition, 1:vi; 10:274; 11:44.
42. *Hobbies*, February, 1939.
43. Facsimile supplied by Dr. Louis A. Warren, Lincoln National Life Foundation, Fort Wayne, Indiana.
44. J. W. Schuckers, *The Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase*, facsimile at p. 513.
45. *Hobbies*, February, 1939.
46. *Tylers*, 167.
47. From the facsimile issued by Gabriel Welles.
48. *Hobbies*, February, 1941.
49. Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln, The War Years*, 3:414.
50. Personal Letters from Mr. Townsend.
51. Sarah Forbes Hughes, *Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes*, 2:76.
52. *Official Records*, Ser. 3, Vol. 4, pp. 500, 501.
53. William O. Stoddard, *Inside the White House in War Times*, pp. 14, 17, 243.
54. *Glimpses of the Nation's Struggle*, Papers Read before the Minnesota Commandery of the Loyal Legion, containing *Reminiscences of the Last Year of Presi-*

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- dent *Lincoln's Life*, by Chaplain Edward D. Neill, D.D. The dates are indicated at pp. 31 and 51.
55. William O. Stoddard, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 283.
 56. Stoddard, *Inside the White House*, pp. 27, 28, 32, 33, 143, 201-204, 219, 228.
 57. *Official Records*, Ser. 1, Vol. 51. Pt. 1, p. 22.
 58. Neill, *Reminiscences*, pp. 31, 35, 36, 40.
 59. Nicholas Murray Butler, *Across the Busy Years*, 2:390 ff.
 60. *Hobbies*, February, 1941.
 61. In *Dictionary of American Biography*, article on John Milton Hay, 8:433.
 62. John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, A History*, 1:X, XIII.
 63. William Roscoe Thayer, *The Life and Letters of John Hay*, 2:30-34; Tyler Dennett, *John Hay*, 138 f., 141.
 64. Roy P. Basler, *The Lincoln Legend*, 14.
 65. Edward Hungerford, *The Story of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad*, facsimile, 2:58, for the letter to Garrett. The original of the autograph for Lady Villiers is in the Brown University Library. The other letters mentioned may be found readily in the Lincoln anthologies. David Homer Bates, *Lincoln in the Telegraph Office*, p. 123.
 66. Letter of April 7, 1945.
 67. Letter of April 17, 1945.
 68. Roy P. Basler, "Who wrote the 'Letter to Mrs. Bixby'?" in *The Lincoln Herald*, February, 1943, p. 12.
 69. *Lincoln Letters Hitherto Unpublished in the Library of Brown University and Other Providence Libraries*. For the telegram to Fremont, p. 18; for that to Butler, p. 36; for the telegram to Mrs. Lincoln, p. 47.
 70. Basler, *Lincoln Herald*, February, 1943; p. 11 f.

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71. Rufus Rockwell Wilson, *Intimate Memories of Lincoln*, p. 499. The letter is dated June 6, 1865.
72. Earl Curzon of Kedleston, *Modern Parliamentary Eloquence* (1913), p. 74 n.
73. Tyler Dennett, *Lincoln and the Civil War in the Diaries and Letters of John Hay*, p. 104.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
75. *Complete Works*, 9:181 f.
76. Gilbert A. Tracy, *Uncollected Letters of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 227.
77. *Complete Works*, 9:14 f.
78. Paul M. Angle, *New Letters and Papers of Lincoln*, p. 337.
79. Letter of May 15, 1945, to the author from the Henry E. Huntington Library.
80. Dennett, *Lincoln in Diaries . . . of John Hay*, 82, 91; Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, A History*, 7:384 ff. In his *Diary* entry of August 23 Hay wrote: "He [the President] went to the library to write a letter to Conkling." In a letter of August 27, 1945, Professor Basler informed the author that his photostat shows this letter to be "in the hand of a third secretary."
- 80^a. Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, A History*, 7:349. Emanuel Hertz "informed" Professor Basler that this letter was "penned by Nicolay."
81. Dennett, *Lincoln in Diaries . . . of John Hay*, 75, 78.
82. *A Catalogue of Books and Autographs*, sold by Wm. D. Morley, Inc., January 26, 1943; p. 49.
83. *Complete Works*, 9:58 ff. The text varies slightly from that in the *Morley Catalogue*. In some respects the latter seems more accurate.
84. Dennett, *Lincoln in Diaries . . . of John Hay*,

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- 70-78. Professor Basler has a photostat of the letter to Halleck.
85. *Complete Works*, in the following order of citation: 10:274 f.; 10:275 f.; 9:209 f.; 6:297-325 *passim*; 6:358 ff.
86. *Hobbies*, February, 1939. It should be pointed out that Lincoln used the phrase "under God" in the delivery of the Gettysburg Address, and included it in the three copies he subsequently penned.
87. *Tyler's*, 167.
88. For these proclamations, *Complete Works*, 7:144 f.; 10:211 f.; 10:245 f. (The italics are the author's.)
89. For this group of citations, Paul M. Angle, *New Letters and Papers of Lincoln*, 12 and 75; *Complete Works*, 2:177.
90. For these letters, *Complete Works*, 2:147 ff.; 7:307.
91. Richard F. Mott, *Memoir and Correspondence of Eliza P. Gurney*, 307-313; *Complete Works*, 8:51.
92. *Complete Works*, 10:215 f.
93. J. A. Spender, *Life, Journalism and Politics*, 1:177.
94. *The New York Times*, Sunday, May 14, 1933.
95. E. V. Lucas, *The Second Post*, London, 1910.
96. E. V. Lucas, *Post-Bag Diversions*, London, 1934; pp. 132 f.
97. Nicholas Murray Butler, *Across the Busy Years*, 2:390-393.
98. John Morley, *Recollections*, 2:106 ff.
99. *Tyler's*, 170.
100. Thayer, *Life and Letters of John Hay*, 2:41.
101. *Complete Works*, 1:XXIX, XXX.
102. Rosamond Gilder, *Letters of Richard Watson Gilder*, p. 344.
103. Nathaniel Wright Stephenson, *An Autobiography of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 438 n.

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104. *A Catalogue of Lincolniana*, issued as a handsome folio in 1929 by Thomas F. Madigan. The item is no. 122 on p. 55.
105. Joseph H. Barrett, *Abraham Lincoln and His Presidency*, 2:372.
106. *Lincoln Herald*, February, 1943; p. 10; Dennett, *Lincoln . . . in Diaries . . . of John Hay*, p. 236.
107. *Lincoln Herald*, as above, p. 12; Dennett, p. 225.
108. Tyler Dennett, *John Hay*, pp. 336, 432, 435.
109. Original in the files of the Massachusetts Historical Society.
110. Alfred L. P. Dennis, in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, 8:431.
111. Caroline Ticknor, *Poe's Helen*, p. 37.
112. *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 40.
113. Caroline Ticknor, editor, *A Poet in Exile*, pp. 44, 45.
114. *The Atlantic Monthly*, July, 1861, pp. 119, 122, 125.
115. Dennett, *Lincoln . . . in Diaries . . . of John Hay*, p. 254; Thayer, *Life and Letters of John Hay*, 1:236.
116. Thayer, *Life . . . of John Hay*, 1:320.
117. *Ibid.*, 2:60 f.
118. *Boston Transcript*, August 4, 1925.
119. We have found many indications of the keen interest with which Robert Todd Lincoln sought for facts to verify his own conviction that his father composed the Bixby letter. He responded to many inquiries while the matter was up for discussion in 1925. We have seen copies of some of his replies to personal correspondents, and newspaper clippings in which he indicated his ignorance of the fate of the original letter, and of his desire to avoid controversy over its authorship. In a letter written in the centenary year, 1909, he referred to his having once discussed with John Hay "the ease with which a forgery could be made."

Notes

Frederic N. Towers, Esquire, former secretary of Robert Todd Lincoln, has been asked often for information on these points. He is not dogmatic in his statements about the rough notes of numerous documents written in Lincoln's hand, but he has affirmed his ignorance of any document or other evidence bearing on the Bixby letter. He holds steadfastly to the opinion, however, that "the literary style and conciseness of expression in the letter is that of President Lincoln and no one else."

In many minds the question will arise whether the Lincoln papers deposited in the Library of Congress contain any material applicable to our inquiry. There is reason to believe that these papers contain little which is new about Lincoln. They were used by Nicolay and Hay in the preparation of their biography of Lincoln and it is known that what they did not publish from these papers probably "seemed to consist of material which they thought too trivial for publication, or which they did not understand." When these papers were deposited in the Library a catalogue was prepared by an official in the Manuscripts Division, and impounded later with the papers themselves. The late Worthington C. Ford, famous as an expert in all such matters, told the present writer and others in Boston, that he had seen the papers and had found in them nothing discreditable to Lincoln and very little of value not already known. Library officials themselves have said that the collection consists largely of letters addressed *to* Lincoln. The President's son presumably knew well the contents of these files. They were in his possession for many years both before and after their having been used by Nicolay and Hay. Our investigations have yielded no

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hint that any fact bearing on the authorship of the Bixby letter would be found in the papers which he impounded in the Library of Congress.

We append a letter of condolence, dated June 9, 1864, written by John Hay to a friend in Massachusetts. He said: "I will not intrude upon your sorrow further than to express my deep sympathy for your great loss and my prayer that a merciful God may give you that consolation which mortal love is too weak to offer. I have sent your letter to my mother who will join me in my sympathy and prayers."

We record also the fact that the alleged facsimiles of the letter to Mrs. Bixby have been subjected to the expert examination of one of the most eminent handwriting authorities in the United States, and he pronounces them to be forgeries. Dr. Henry B. Van Hoesen, Librarian of Brown University, has printed an interesting and useful item on the problem of the Bixby letter scribe in the March, 1946, issue of *Books at Brown*, in which he expresses the hope that Dr. Albert S. Osborn, the handwriting expert alluded to above, will publish a statement on the subject.



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