

28. BIXBY LETTER OF CONDOLENCE

The original of the Bixby letter apparently has been lost. It has been alleged that this famous letter was not written by Lincoln. Recently, a certain distinguished American educator stated that he was told in 1912 by Lord Morley that John Hay, one of Lincoln's private secretaries, told him in 1905 that he wrote the letter. Lincoln scholars remain unconvinced. It is pointed out that the Bixby letter shows all the qualities of Lincoln's literary style. Regardless of the dispute that has developed over the authorship of this letter, it is given below as a Lincoln document. As a message of condolence it is generally considered unsurpassed.

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.

LINCOLN TO MRS. BIXBY, NOVEMBER 21, 1864.

29. LINCOLN WRITES TO A GENERAL

Lincoln wrote over 30 letters to General Hooker. One has become so famous that it is commonly known as "The Hooker Letter." It notified Hooker that he had been given command of the Army of the Potomac, replacing Burnside, following the latter's calamitous defeat at the Battle of Fredericksburg. The unique quality of this remarkable letter lies in the fact that it is a magnificent character sketch of the writer himself. In it Lincoln's frankness, integrity, magnanimity, and his paramount concern for the success of the Army and the preservation of the Nation are fully revealed. Hooker himself apparently was visibly touched by the letter. Shortly after receiving it he discussed it one evening with Noah Brooks who reports that Hooker said, "That is just such a letter as a father might write to his son. It is a beautiful letter, and, although I think he was harder on me than I deserved, I will say that I love the man who wrote it."

General: I have placed you at the head of the Army of the Potomac. Of course I have done this upon what appear to me to be sufficient reasons, and yet I think it best for you to know that there are some things in regard to which I am not quite satisfied with you. I believe you to be a brave and skilful soldier, which of course I like. I also believe you do not mix politics with your profession, in which you are right. You have confidence in yourself, which is a valuable if not an indispensable quality. You are ambitious, which, within reasonable bounds, does

good rather than harm; but I think that during General Burnside's command of the army you have taken counsel of your ambition and thwarted him as much as you could, in which you did a great wrong to the country and to a most meritorious and honorable brother officer. I have heard, in such a way as to believe it, of your recently saying that both the army and the government needed a dictator. Of course it was not for this, but in spite of it, that I have given you the command. Only those generals who gain successes can set up dictators. What I now