

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

No. 338

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

September 30, 1935

LINCOLN'S CORRESPONDENCE

Over 2,500 letters written by Abraham Lincoln in free hand have been published, and this represents but a part of the voluminous correspondence which came from his pen. In June, 1860, in writing to a friend, Lincoln said he had received his letter with "multitudes of others." After his election his correspondence increased until it was "almost overwhelming," as he described it.

Salutations

Lincoln was very anxious after he reached the presidential office that the salutations used in his letters should be correct in form and usage. In writing to Archbishop Hughes he said, "I am sure you will pardon me if in my ignorance I do not address you with technical correctness." His expression of salutation was "Right Reverend Sir." Three days before writing to the Archbishop he had written to the Viceroy of Egypt and addressed him as "Great and Good Friend." Lincoln had also used the same salutation in writing to the Tycoon of Japan.

In his early Illinois days his closer friends had been addressed as "My dear Stuart," "My dear Speed, etc." A salutation in which the one word "Friend" preceded the addressee's last name was often used later on, such as "Friend McNamer," "Friend Browning, etc." With few exceptions he rarely used the first name of an individual in addressing him. Richard S. Thomas he called "Friend Richard" and Walter Davis, "Friend Walter."

In writing to William Herndon the form used was "Dear William" and he continued to so address his last law partner, after he was elected to the presidency. Possibly the most friendly salutation he used outside of family relationship was in writing to Samuel D. Marshall whom he called "Friend Sam" and also "Dear Sam." About 1850 much of his correspondence used the formal "Sir," "Dear Sir," or "My dear Sir or Madam."

In writing to his wife, he addressed her as "Dear Mary" or "My dear wife." Most of Lincoln's correspondence was with men. In one instance, however, he received a congratulatory letter from a woman. He replied in part, "I have never corresponded much with ladies, and hence I postpone writing letters to them as a business which I do not understand."

There was usually no salutation used in addressing his generals, but occasionally the expression "Dear General" crept into his correspondence; and often a cabinet member was addressed as "Dear Sir."

Penmanship

Lincoln's handwriting changed considerably during his lifetime, and in later years his penmanship appeared much more open and not so pleasing as it did in his earlier years. Many long briefs penned by him when he first began to practice law in Springfield are extant and all of them seem to be carefully written.

Bad handwriting was responsible for the closest approach to profanity which Lincoln is known to have made. He wrote to Herndon, his law partner, about settling a

case and said he would like to get the matter off of his hands; and then concluded:

"I have already been bored more than enough about it; not the least of which annoyance is his cursed, unreadable, and ungodly handwriting."

Writing Habits

A letter written to E. B. Washburn on May 26, 1860, reveals that Lincoln wrote slowly. After making some casual observances about his nomination, he wrote, "I hope you will write often; and as you write more rapidly than I do, don't make your letters so short as mine." It was this habit of carefully weighing his words which allowed him, in 1863, to write to one of his generals who had caused the arrest of an editor for publishing one of Lincoln's letters, "I care very little for the publication of any letter I have written."

Lincoln's Secretary of the Treasury, Hugh McCulloch, states that Lincoln wrote "correctly and with great precision. In clearness of expression, in conciseness, in the use of apt and appropriate language, which everybody could understand, it would be difficult to find his superior."

Length of Letters

To Schuyler Colfax, who five days before had written to Lincoln apologizing for again writing so soon, Lincoln replied, "I should be right glad to have one from you every day." This attitude, however, prompted him to conclude, "You will readily understand and appreciate why I write only very short letters."

To William Herndon in 1862 he wrote, "As you well know I have not time to write a letter of respectable length."

Unanswered Correspondence

Most busy men, who are burdened with a large volume of correspondence, are guilty of procrastination with respect to answering important letters which need more time and thought than the routine correspondence requires. Lincoln was often humiliated by realizing that important letters had gone unanswered too long. He advised one man whose letter he had failed to answer: "In a general bringing up of my correspondence, I perhaps should have reached it today."

In correspondence with Carl Schurz, Lincoln's tardy reply to a letter caused him to write, "I am much mortified that I did not attend to it at once. I fear I have no sufficient apology." He concludes his letter by saying, "And now upon this bad beginning, you must not determine to write me no more; for I promise you that no letters of yours to me shall ever again be neglected."

Acknowledgments

Although often advised that no reply was necessary, Lincoln felt an acknowledgment was the least he could do, and he wrote to a correspondent, Mr. Eddy, from whom he had received a letter, "Although you considerably say I need not answer it, I will at least acknowledge its receipt."