

# LINCOLN LORE

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## THE COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE OF LINCOLN'S LETTERS

Abraham Lincoln was often at loss to know just what salutation was proper in addressing some foreign dignitary but he never lacked for words of the most impressive and meaningful character when he penned the closing sentence of a letter. The clear forceful language with which Lincoln expressed himself in his correspondence, never left any doubt as to the essence of the subject matter. He wrote to one inquirer who apparently was trying to read between the lines:

"Look over it carefully, and conclude I meant all I said, and did not mean anything I did not say, and you will have my meaning."

On one occasion he wrote a follow-up letter to Horatio Seymour and made the remark with respect to a previous piece of correspondence: "No part of my former letter is repudiated by reason of not being reinstated in this or for any other cause." To another correspondent he wrote: "This is not a long letter but it contains the whole story."

The care Lincoln exercised in making his correspondence intelligible was supplemented by a further desire to reveal to the recipient his frame of mind when writing which was probably as free from malice as that of any public man. The important closing sentence was the vehicle he most often used in removing any suspicion the addressee might have with respect to the writer's personal feelings towards him. A few excerpts set forth this attitude:

Cuthbert Bullitt, July 28, 1862. "I am in no boastful mood. I shall not do more than I can, and I shall do all that I can, to save the government, which is my personal inclination. I shall do nothing in malice what I deal with is too vast for malicious dealing."

Hon. Schuyler Colfax, March 8, 1861. "I now have to beg that you will not do me the injustice to suppose for a moment that I remember anything against you through malice."

Mrs. J. C. Fremont, Sept. 12, 1861. "No impression has been made on my mind against the honor or integrity of General Fremont, and I now enter my protest against being understood as acting in any hostility toward him."

George P. Fisher, Aug. 16, 1862. "I do hope you will not indulge a thought which will admit of your saying the administration turns you over to the fury of your enemies. You certainly know I wish you success as much as you can wish it for yourself."

Gov. O. P. Morton, June 28, 1862. "No appointment has been or will be made for the purpose of stabbing you."

Gen. Rosecrans, May 28, 1863. "I am not watching you with an evil eye."

The complimentary closing of Lincoln's letters must have brought much satisfaction to those who received them. While not lavish with praise Lincoln did express his appreciation for those especially well qualified in their respective fields of effort as these excerpts will reveal:

Capt. G. V. Fox, Jan. 1, 1861. "For a daring and dangerous enterprise of a similar character you would today be the man of all my acquaintances whom I would select."

Maj. Gen. S. R. Curtis, Jan. 8, 1863. "With me the presumption is still in your favor; that you are honest, capable, faithful and patriotic."

I. N. Arnold, May 25, 1864. "I take it that your devotion to the Union and the administration cannot be questioned by any sincere man."

Montgomery Blair, Sept. 23, 1864. "Your uniform kindness has been unsurpassed by that of any friend."

Letter introducing Edward Everett, Sept. 24, 1862. "He bears no mission from this government; and yet no gentleman is better able to correct misunderstandings in the minds of foreigners in regard to American affairs."

S. P. Chase, March 10, 1862. "No man can be more safely trusted. I beg you to afford him all proper facilities, with perfect assurance that no confidence reposed in him will be abused."

Hon. John H. Bryant, May 30, 1864. "Let him have the marble monument along with the well-assured and more enduring one in the hearts of those who love liberty unselfishly for all men."

Editor, *Chicago Journal*, Nov. 21, 1849. "I believe him too, to be an able and faithful officer. A more intimate acquaintance with him would probably change the views of most of those who have complained of him."

It always pained Lincoln to refuse requests which were in his power to grant but he would not compromise on questionable enterprises. His concluding sentences in replying to such letters are interesting, indeed, in the light of the present investigations in high places.

William Kellogg, June 29, 1863. "This administration would do for you as much as for any other man; and I personally would do more than for most others; but really I cannot involve myself and the government as this would do."

Maj. John J. Kee. "I am very sorry for the pain the case gives you; but I do not see how, consistently with duty, I can change it."

John J. Hardin, Jan. 19, 1845. "I have always been in the habit of acceding to almost any proposal that a friend would make and I am truly sorry that I cannot in this."

Maj. Gen. N. P. Banks, Apr. 5, 1865. "This is certainly meant in no unkindness, but I wish to avoid further struggle about it."

O. H. Browning, Jan. 29, 1850. "What I have to say I say most cheerfully; and more I could not now say consistently."

One of the most noble qualities of Abraham Lincoln was his forbearance, yet he was more severely criticized for this trait than almost any other. Some illustrations of this characteristic found in the closing sentences of his letters are presented:

Charles D. Drake & others, Oct. 5, 1863. "It is my duty to hear all, but at last I must, within my sphere, judge what to do and what to forbear."

J. J. Crittenden, July 7, 1858. "If such was your inclination I do not believe you would so express yourself. It is not in character with you as I have always estimated you. . . . If your purposes are as I hope they are not, please let me know. The information would pain me much, but I should still continue your friend and admirer."

George B. McClellan, April 9, 1866. "I beg to assure you that I have never written you or spoken to you in greater kindness of feeling than now, nor with a further purpose to sustain you, so far as in my most anxious judgment I consistently can, but you must act."

Rev. Dr. Ide & others, May 30, 1864. "The devil's attempt was no more false and far less hypocritical. But let me forbear remembering it is also written, 'Judge not lest ye be judged.'"