

came of good stock, and while his early surroundings were subject to rough frontier conditions, he had some education and good associations.

“Abraham Lincoln came of a much more humble class, being a member of a family sunk in poverty, and with no associations except with people like themselves. Thomas Lincoln, his father, could neither read nor write. The earliest papers of Lincoln in our archives reveal his efforts to attain the rudiments of an education, which he was making of his own volition. Had he been an ordinary man he would have lived his life through as a woodchopper and a poor farmer.

“It has been truly said that no one really knew Lincoln well, for he disclosed his inner thoughts less than has any other American public man who has risen to fame. Even those who were constantly associated with him after he became President, while they can give many anecdotes concerning him, have never been able to tell what his inner thoughts and feelings were. In the matter of his language, he presented the phenomenon which has been observed in the case of others who have had little book learning; his mind, unhampered by the written language of others, naturally found vent in the simplest and most natural language, and the result is a rhetorical perfection which arose from his own simple, perfect nature.

“The Gettysburg address is one of the masterpieces of American literature, and it would be hard to find anything in the English language more beautifully expressed than the letter to Mrs. Bixby. So perfect is the diction of this letter to the mother who gave her five sons to the war that it hangs in Oxford University, England, as an example of the purest English and most delicate diction extant.

“The original of the letter is lost, but here is the fac-simile:

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 pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

A. LINCOLN.

“Lincoln never wrote a letter or made a speech which was not excellent in thought and expression. It is said that when he prepared his famous inaugural address he borrowed two books, one containing Andrew Jackson’s famous proclamation against the nullifiers in South Carolina and the other a volume of Jefferson’s works.