

LINCOLN'S WIDOW WROTE OF POVERTY

Letters Found by a Composer Here Tell of Pecuniary Distress After President's Death.

DISCOVERED IN OLD DESK

One Complains of Injustice of the People—Another Shows Worry Over Debt.

Two letters from Mrs. Abraham Lincoln written shortly after the assassination of her husband showing plainly her pecuniary distress, have been found by B. Sherman Fowler, a composer, of 31 East Forty-ninth Street, in a secret compartment of an old rosewood desk. Both letters are addressed to Benjamin D. Sherman, Mr. Fowler's grandfather, who was a financier and was in charge of the "Dollar Fund" which collected \$10,747.77 for Mrs. Lincoln. He was President of the Mechanics National Bank, a founder of the Central Trust Company and of the Union League Club, a Senior Warden of Grace Church and connected with many financial, patriotic and other institutions.

With the letters, behind the secret panel, were found the cash book of the "Dollar Fund" and a curious old gold pen which apparently belonged to Mr. Sherman. The desk itself is an heirloom. A cabinet worker recently offered Mr. Fowler \$1,000 for it. Mr. Fowler remembers it in the old family mansion at 16 East Twentieth Street, but knew nothing of the hidden compartments until a few days ago, when he became curious over what appeared to be waste space. With a knife he pried open the panel to discover the documents that will probably be turned over to the New York Historical Society as valuable evidence concerning Mrs. Lincoln, a little known person in history.

Mrs. Lincoln "Homeless."

The first letter is dated the day after Christmas, 1865, and is from Chicago. It reads:

"My Dear Sir: Although my son wrote you a letter on yesterday, I have concluded to write and thank you, most gratefully, for your kind interest in our deeply afflicted family. We have, indeed, lost our all; the idolized husband and father is no more with us, and, if possible, our adverse fate and the great injustice of a people who owed so much to my beloved husband does not contribute toward lessening our heavy trials. Sir Morton Pelo gave a farewell dinner to his friends in New York in return for their polite attentions to him. We are homeless, and in return for the sacrifices my great and noble husband made, both in his life and in his death, the paltry first year's salary is offered us, under the circumstances: such injustice has been done us as calls the blush to any true, loyal heart. The sum is in reality only \$20,000, as the first month's salary was paid my husband, and I presume the tax on it will be deducted from it. The interest of it will be about \$1,500. I am humiliated when I think that we are destined to be forever homeless. I can write no more. I remain, very respectfully,
MARY LINCOLN."

"P. S.—I omitted to say, my dear Mr. Sherman, mentioning to you what has been told me several times lately; persons apparently reliable saying that to their knowledge \$10,000 in money toward the dollar fund had been raised in Boston. I mention this so that you might write to Boston to ascertain the truth of this report. Knowing my anxiety to have a home where we could at least have some privacy and your good feeling for us in our distress will, I am sure, induce you to write about this to B. Excuse my troubling you in this matter, &c. I agree with R. (her son Robert) it is best not to advertise; if there is anything at such an hour as this, it will be forthcoming. M. L."

The Sir Morton Pelo referred to was an Englishman much entertained while on a visit to this country, so much so that the contrast between his treatment and that of her dead husband seems to have struck Mrs. Lincoln.

Worried Over a Bill.

The second letter is dated Chicago, Jan. 13, 1866. The General Spinner alluded to in the second sentence appears to be Francis Elias Spinner, once a shoemaker, and at that date Treasurer of the United States.

"My Dear Sir: The enclosed letter has just been received from Mr. Godfrey. General Spinner, two days ago, sent me the sum allowed by Congress, deducting six weeks from it with interest, making it \$22,025, leaving me to pay the income tax, which will leave only \$20,000. Presuming, as Mr. Moses and Mr. Godfrey did, that you intended settling with them immediately, by return mail, I sent the draft back to General Spinner to have him place it in seven-thirties, and return it to me. Now what am I to do? Will there be any objections on your part to settle with Moses when you receive this? I can certainly see no reason to the contrary. It will be very inconvenient for me now to change the money as it is placed. May I ask you, as a last favor, to see Mr. Moses and Godfrey, when you receive this, and have the first(?) bill cut down considerably? Your influence can accomplish this. You will see by Mr. Godfrey's letter that there is not an hour's delay. If you will not accede to this proposition, will you please telegraph me, when you receive this. I earnestly request that you see Mr. Godfrey and Moses without fail when you receive this.

"I have written to Mr. Bentley ten days since, with reference to this, and he does not reply. I requested him to have the amount greatly reduced and send me the bill, and urge upon you to settle it. This certainly appeared to be the best use to make of some of the funds you may have. I write in great haste and much harassed by Godfrey's letter and this unsettled business. Will you grant my requests, see Moses and Godfrey, and if you are not inclined to settle with them, please telegraph me, so that by some manner of means, as inconvenient as it is, I must make some arrangements to settle without an hour's delay. As to Mr. Godfrey's expenses to Washington, &c., I had no knowledge of his intention to present himself on the occasion and with my limited means could scarcely meet that expense. Most earnestly praying you will grant my requests, I remain truly and gratefully,
"MARY LINCOLN."

Mr. Fowler does not know the facts about his grandfather's management of the "Dollar Fund," nor who all the persons alluded to may have been. It appears that Moses and Godfrey were lawyers of some kind connected with the matter. Mr. Fowler said that historical experts interested in this matter would be able to discover the facts that were common knowledge in his family fifty-six years ago.