

Ms. A. 7. 3. 126

Miss Caroline Weston
To Mrs. Mary A. Estlin.

DAY, MAY 26, 1865

THE POPULAR FEELING IN AMERICA.

THE following is an extract from a private letter written by a well known New England Abolitionist to a friend in England. Although the events to which it refers have long since been made public, the authentic expression which it affords of the popular feeling in the Free States gives it interest:—

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I write to-day from the midst of a national sorrow, deeper and more bitter than can be told, and which seems more intense as the weary days go on, and the terrible event of last week is more distinctly realised. I shall send you by this post some American newspapers containing particulars of this last dreadful crime, the completion of an iniquity that was already beyond precedent. You will have seen already the accounts furnished by your newspapers; but as they are, with few exceptions, favourable to the rebels, you may not get clear ideas from them of how the event is regarded here, or what is the real aspect and the true feeling of the country under these exciting and afflicting circumstances. I was thinking of you during the brilliant rejoicing over our recent victories and the prospect of the termination of the war, and intended to claim the sympathy I knew you were feeling for us while you read of the fall of Petersburg and Richmond, and the surrender of Lee—events which virtually ended the rebellion; for they left the rebels without cities or fortresses, without Generals or armies, without seaports, supplies, or means of transport, and, best of all, *without slaves*; left all who were weary of the fight to go home to their families, and set at liberty thousands of prisoners, not to speak of the emancipation of hosts of Union men shut up in Southern cities. Joy was in all hearts, and everywhere flags were flying, glad bells were ringing, cannon roaring, and everywhere was the voice of thanksgiving to God, who had given the victory.

Then came this last overwhelming blow. It is heart-breaking. Never, I think, has any man so associated himself with all that is holiest and noblest in a nation's life as President Lincoln has done with ours. He was beloved in every home as a personal friend is beloved. Never have we ourselves felt so deep a sorrow except when death was under our own roof. The integrity, elevation, fearlessness, and tenderness of his character were widely and deeply felt. No selfish purposes, no low ambition, deformed his large and generous nature. I believe God had made and trained him for the great emergency to which he was called, and for which his rare qualities so singularly, and it would almost seem miraculously, fitted him. He was a man endowed with uncommon wisdom and wonderful equanimity of character, and his solemn sense of the vast responsibility of his position was accompanied with a consciousness of corresponding ability. How he had been beloved and trusted in his Western home before his public services made him known to the whole nation, you will recall. He was a great and good man, murdered by those whose souls rest all the righteous blood spilt since the beginning. For this is no chance shot of a madman, no private vengeance of a fancied wrong. It is the last expiring effort of slaveholding barbarism, ignorantly thinking to distract, and perhaps destroy, the country by this blow at the Government. No doubt is entertained that it was intended to murder not only the President and Secretary of State, but Mr. Stanton and Mr. Sumner, as well as the Vice-President and other important men. Happily the opportunities or the courage of the other ruffians were insufficient. The telegraph caused, on that fatal morning of April 15, a shock to every home in the wide loyal United States. There was grief and mourning in every house as when a beloved one lies dead. The mourning was deep, and universal, and spontaneous, as, by common consent, dwellings and public buildings were covered with emblems of mourning. The grief of the people everywhere found a religious expression. There was prayer in the dwellings of the citizens; in the churches; on "Change"—everywhere wherever two or three were gathered together by chance. The people seemed now to bow in one agony of prayer and application, as they had a few days before united in a joyful thanksgiving. It was a strange time for such a great blow. The land was full of thanksgiving that the war was virtually ended, and this thanksgiving, however triumphant might be its feeling in view of a country redeemed from a great sin and a great danger, was singularly free from any sentiment of animosity or revenge on those whose wickedness had brought us so dreadful a trial. Everywhere the wish to restore the South as speedily as possible to quiet and prosperity, and to deal as generously as possible with the rebels, was paramount. Even till now many were saying, "Forgive them who knew not what they did." This spirit of forgiveness seemed to have a sudden increase, as the obvious termination of the war opened such a happy prospect for the future. All felt that the reorganisation of society at the South in the new state of things—with the new element of free labour and freed men and women—presented many difficult problems. But there was a perfect confidence placed in the President and his Cabinet, and all trusted that things would work well. Never shall I forget the horror of that day which brought us the news of the

assassination: there was no early train to our village, and a dreadful rumour reached us early (brought by some one who had seen at a distant station a passenger by the New York train), that "the President had been stabbed, was in extremis, but not dead;" then another report followed that Mr. Seward had been attacked. We passed two restless hours, and then our own train came bringing confirmation; but we passed all the first part of the day in painful agitation, as the telegrams reported both the President and Secretary mortally wounded, and then at last came the tidings that *both were dead*. The news happily was untrue as regarded Mr. Seward, but for two hours we thought both were no more! No one can tell what it was, and as we felt so felt all. I saw everywhere men and women in tears, and a gloom like that of the grave was in every house. In Boston not only all places of business and amusement, but all public-houses and dram shops were shut, and the city has been hushed these last nights like a city of the dead.

With all this grief and mourning came no thought of fear, no doubt of the safety and stability of the Government: the strong foundations of a nation resting on so broad a basis can be shaken by no one death, no single man's loss, however wise and great and good. Lincoln will be missed as never man was; but there was no fear, no panic; no public function was left unfulfilled at Washington; financial affairs were unaffected by it; it had no other effect on the gold market than that the brokers, with one consent, closed their places of business, and it was felt to be no time for speculations. Expressions of sympathy with the Vice-President, so suddenly and awfully called into office, came from all quarters. I believe there is little doubt of the existence of a conspiracy as extensive and as formidable as that which threatened Mr. Lincoln's life at the time of his first inauguration. Though the proper measures for safety were taken, yet I suppose that men living so long in the midst of war did not at every instant remember that rewards for the assassination of our chief men—Lincoln first of all—have been repeatedly inserted in the rebel newspapers. Lee, Davis, Benjamin, Floyd, &c., have seen, under their own eyes, and by their own orders, thousands and thousands of our prisoners dying in a state too horrible for description—of cold and hunger, devoured by vermin, without water, and shot down if they dared approach the narrow window of their crowded prison for a ray of light or a breath of air. Multitudes died in prison of these horrors. Multitudes, exchanged for strong and healthy men, died after reaching our camps—many having forgotten their own names, and returning to their comrades in a state of idiocy, soon followed by death. Others gained strength, by tender and careful treatment, to reach their own homes and die among their kindred. Two such funerals passed our door last week. For these things is the man whom the London News calls a "fine soldier," a "gallant gentleman," &c., accountable. They express admiration of a man who has betrayed his country and fired on his flag. What would they say of a British officer who had done these things? . . . Vain is magnanimity and generosity when one deals with men whose life has been spent in the unrestrained indulgence of the basest passions, to whom faith and honour are unknown. Lee, who flogged a helpless woman with his own hands; Jefferson Davis, who has been making a fortune by blockade-running, while his dupes were starving and dying of cold and hunger; Benjamin, who was in his youth a detected thief at Yale College, saved from public punishment only by the generosity of his college class; Floyd, the robber of the public money; and all the rest, loaded with crime and treason, are not proper objects of sympathy. If there have been any thoughts of amnesties that should include the leaders and officers of the rebellion, it has, I think, passed away. All these men who do not get out of the country will be brought to trial for their crimes. Mr. Seward's escape is truly wonderful, and I am astonished that at his age, and in his situation, he had not yielded to the shock. Think of an old man, helpless from the accident of the preceding week, attacked and repeatedly stabbed in the face and neck, and aware that a death struggle was going on in his room between his brave servant and the assassin! It seems his presence of mind never deserted him. As soon as the man grappled with the murderer and forced him away for a moment, the Secretary did the only thing left for him. He rolled himself from the bed, and when they went to him and thought him dead or dying, as he lay in a pool of blood, he roused himself to give the necessary orders—"I am not dead; send for the police and a surgeon, and close the house," and then he spoke no more for a long time. That Mr. Seward's life is spared we feel to be a special providence, for his wisdom, and ability, and devotion were ever more needed than now. I suppose that danger from these desperate representatives of the "Confederacy" is still apprehended, as a guard is placed round Charles Sumner's house. . . . The ruffians are supposed to be connected with the St. Albans raiders, as Mr. Seward was warned by a letter from Canada of an attempt about to be made on his and the President's life; but, in consequence of the dangerous accident which confided him to his bed, he could not give the letter the attention it deserved. . . . But I have no more time or space. Think of us as troubled, but not despairing—cast down, but not destroyed. Our great grief is that Abraham Lincoln could not live to enjoy the safety and prosperity which he has done so much to establish, and the love of a people who understood him and valued him as he deserved. He will be missed in every way, but no doubt or fear darkens the future of the Republic. Never since we were a nation were we so strong as now, when all the strength, ability, and virtue in the land push by a natural law in the right direction.

