

Lincoln & Booth Letters: Evil Will Outsell the Good

By JOHN GARABEDIAN

"I have been so taken up with pastimes and various amusements that I can hardly find time to sleep, and that is something new to me, being a very late riser . . . You must not think I am blowing, but I cut quite a dash . . ."

So said John Wilkes Booth in 1855.

"At the meeting at Jonesborough . . . our friends were a little better satisfied with the result than our adversaries . . ."

So said Abraham Lincoln after the third Lincoln-Douglas debate in 1858.

The words of the two men, the President and his assassin, are found in two hand-written letters which have, through the years, come to the offices of Charles Hamilton, the autograph auctioneer.

The letters go on sale tomorrow evening in an auction in the Waldorf-Astoria's Jade Room, along with 462 other rare documents, including several letters of Ernest Hemingway, John Dillinger and Albert Einstein, and a menu signed by Joseph Stalin, Harry Truman and Winston Churchill.

Hamilton expects the Booth letter to bring a higher price in the auction than the Lincoln letter, just as in the past Lee Oswald's letters have been more prized by collectors than some of the late President Kennedy's.

"Like it or not," said Hamilton, "people seem more fascinated by evil than by virtue."

Hamilton expects the Booth letter to bring over \$1,000, and he believes the Lincoln letter will be sold for slightly less.

This follows a general pattern Hamilton has observed through the years. The letters of Field Marshal Rommel are worth 15

times those of Field Marshal Montgomery, he said.

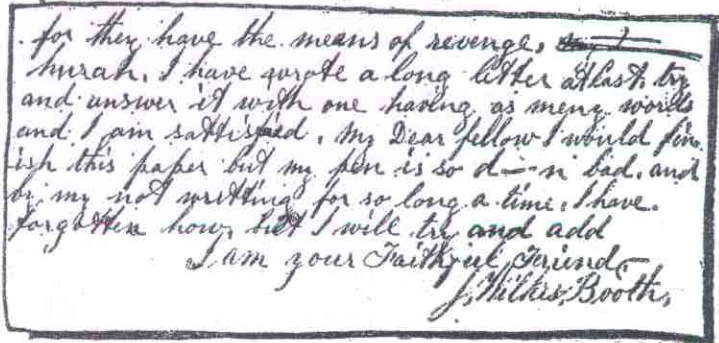
Those of Adolf Eichmann are three times as valuable as the letters of the founders of modern Zionism. John Dillinger's letters are worth about \$600, Hamilton said, while the letters of famous "untouchable" detective Eliot Ness are worth about \$20.

"Evil is unfortunately always fascinating," said Hamilton. "If you go to a zoo, you're fasci-

nated by cobras and rattlesnakes. If you have a choice of two books to read, you'd probably prefer 'The Life and Cruel Deeds of Jesse James' to a volume of sermons."

Hamilton said the letters of Adolf Hitler are worth five times those of Dwight Eisenhower, but he attributed part of the difference in this case to Eisenhower's "rambling, often incoherent" style.

"I dislike the thought of a



Closing of a letter by President Lincoln's assassin.

Presidential murderer's letters being worth more than those of the President himself," Hamilton said, "but that's what happens."

The John Wilkes Booth letter came to Hamilton from Mrs. Agatha McCarthy, an elderly Baltimore widow, who discovered an old desk in the basement of her Baltimore home, which she said was "just full of

Booth."

She burned many of the old letters she found, before she recognized the bold signature: "J. Wilkes Booth."

Her home was owned previously by Thomas Jones, a co-conspirator with Booth in the Lincoln assassination, and somehow Booth's old writing desk had resided for years in Mrs. McCarthy's basement.