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Executive Mansion,

Washington, July 21, 1863.

My dear General Howard

Your letter of the 18th is received. I was deeply mortified by the escape of Lee across the Potomac, because the substantial destruction ^{of his army} would have ended the war, and because I believed, ~~to~~ such destruction was perfectly easy, — believed that Gen. Meade and his noble army had expended all the skill, and toil, and blood, up to the ripe heaven, and then let the crops go to waste. — Perhaps my mortification was ^{heightened} ~~heightened~~ because I have always believed — making my belief a hobby pony — that the main rebel army going North of the Potomac, could never return, if well attended to; and because I was so greatly flattered in this belief, by the operations at Gettysburg. A few days having passed, I am now profoundly grateful for what was done, without criticism for what was not done. Gen. Meade has my confidence as a brave and skillful officer, and a true man.

Yours very truly
A. Lincoln