Classic Poetry Series

Abraham Lincoln

- poems -

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Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)

Abraham Lincoln was the 16th President of the United States, serving from March 1861 until his assassination in April 1865. He successfully led his country through a great constitutional, military and moral crisis – the American Civil War – preserving the Union, while ending slavery, and promoting economic and financial modernization. Reared in a poor family on the western frontier, Lincoln was mostly self-educated. He became a country lawyer, an Illinois state legislator, and a one-term member of the United States House of Representatives, but failed in two attempts to be elected to the United States Senate.

After opposing the expansion of slavery in the United States in his campaign debates and speeches, Lincoln secured the Republican nomination and was elected president in 1860. Before Lincoln took office in March, seven southern slave states declared their secession and formed the Confederacy. When war began with the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, Lincoln concentrated on both the military and political dimensions of the war effort, seeking to reunify the nation. He vigorously exercised unprecedented war powers, including the arrest and detention without trial of thousands of suspected secessionists. He prevented British recognition of the Confederacy by skillfully handling the Trent affair late in 1861. He issued his Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and promoted the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, abolishing slavery.

Lincoln closely supervised the war effort, especially the selection of top generals, including commanding general Ulysses S. Grant. He brought leaders of various factions of his party into his cabinet and pressured them to cooperate. Under his leadership, the Union set up a naval blockade that shut down the South's normal trade, took control of the border slave states at the start of the war, gained control communications with gunboats on the southern river systems, and tried repeatedly to capture the Confederate capital at Richmond. Each time a general failed, Lincoln substituted another until finally Grant succeeded in 1865. An exceptionally astute politician deeply involved with power issues in each state, he reached out to War Democrats and managed his own re-election in the 1864 presidential election.

As the leader of the moderate faction of the Republican party, Lincoln found his policies and personality were "blasted from all sides": Radical Republicans demanded harsher treatment of the South, War Democrats desired more compromise, Copperheads despised him, and irreconcilable secessionists plotted his death. Politically, Lincoln fought back with patronage, by pitting his opponents against each other, and by appealing to the American people with his powers of oratory. His Gettysburg Address of 1863 became the most

quoted speech in American history. It was an iconic statement of America's dedication to the principles of nationalism, equal rights, liberty, and democracy. At the close of the war, Lincoln held a moderate view of Reconstruction, seeking to speedily reunite the nation through a policy of generous reconciliation in the face of lingering and bitter divisiveness. But six days after the surrender of Confederate commanding general Robert E. Lee, Lincoln was assassinated by Confederate sympathizer John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre. His death was the first assassination of a U.S. president and sent the northern parts of the country into mourning. Lincoln has been consistently ranked by scholars and the public as one of the three greatest U.S. presidents

Poetry

The poetry of Abraham Lincoln has been an interesting source into the psyche of this President. In addition to two complete, narrative poems, Abraham Lincoln wrote several small verses throughout his life and possibly a poem in the form of a suicide note.

Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln, His hand and pen: He will be good but God knows When.

Abraham Lincoln Is My Name

Abraham Lincoln is my nam[e] And with my pen I wrote the same I wrote in both hast and speed and left it here for fools to read

My Childhood Home I See Again

Ι

My childhood's home I see again, And sadden with the view; And still, as memory crowds my brain, There's pleasure in it too.

O Memory! thou midway world 'Twixt earth and paradise, Where things decayed and loved ones lost In dreamy shadows rise,

And, freed from all that's earthly vile, Seem hallowed, pure, and bright, Like scenes in some enchanted isle All bathed in liquid light.

As dusky mountains please the eye When twilight chases day; As bugle-tones that, passing by, In distance die away;

As leaving some grand waterfall, We, lingering, list its roar-So memory will hallow all We've known, but know no more.

Near twenty years have passed away Since here I bid farewell To woods and fields, and scenes of play, And playmates loved so well.

Where many were, but few remain Of old familiar things; But seeing them, to mind again The lost and absent brings.

The friends I left that parting day, How changed, as time has sped! Young childhood grown, strong manhood gray, And half of all are dead.

I hear the loved survivors tell How nought from death could save, Till every sound appears a knell, And every spot a grave.

I range the fields with pensive tread, And pace the hollow rooms, And feel (companion of the dead) I'm living in the tombs. ΙΙ

But here's an object more of dread Than ought the grave contains--A human form with reason fled, While wretched life remains.

Poor Matthew! Once of genius bright, A fortune-favored child--Now locked for aye, in mental night, A haggard mad-man wild.

Poor Matthew! I have ne'er forgot, When first, with maddened will, Yourself you maimed, your father fought, And mother strove to kill;

When terror spread, and neighbors ran, Your dange'rous strength to bind; And soon, a howling crazy man Your limbs were fast confined.

How then you strove and shrieked aloud, Your bones and sinews bared; And fiendish on the gazing crowd, With burning eye-balls glared--

And begged, and swore, and wept and prayed With maniac laught[ter?] joined--How fearful were those signs displayed By pangs that killed thy mind!

And when at length, tho' drear and long, Time smoothed thy fiercer woes, How plaintively thy mournful song Upon the still night rose.

I've heard it oft, as if I dreamed, Far distant, sweet, and lone--The funeral dirge, it ever seemed Of reason dead and gone.

To drink it's strains, I've stole away, All stealthily and still, Ere yet the rising God of day Had streaked the Eastern hill.

Air held his breath; trees, with the spell, Seemed sorrowing angels round, Whose swelling tears in dew-drops fell Upon the listening ground.

But this is past; and nought remains, That raised thee o'er the brute. Thy piercing shrieks, and soothing strains, Are like, forever mute.

Now fare thee well--more thou the cause, Than subject now of woe. All mental pangs, by time's kind laws, Hast lost the power to know.

O death! Thou awe-inspiring prince, That keepst the world in fear; Why dost thos tear more blest ones hence, And leave him ling'ring here?

The Bear Hunt

A wild-bear chace, didst never see? Then hast thou lived in vain. Thy richest bump of glorious glee, Lies desert in thy brain.

When first my father settled here, 'Twas then the frontier line: The panther's scream, filled night with fear And bears preyed on the swine.

But wo for Bruin's short lived fun, When rose the squealing cry; Now man and horse, with dog and gun, For vengeance, at him fly.

A sound of danger strikes his ear; He gives the breeze a snuff; Away he bounds, with little fear, And seeks the tangled rough.

On press his foes, and reach the ground, Where's left his half munched meal; The dogs, in circles, scent around, And find his fresh made trail.

With instant cry, away they dash, And men as fast pursue; O'er logs they leap, through water splash, And shout the brisk halloo.

Now to elude the eager pack, Bear shuns the open ground; Th[r]ough matted vines, he shapes his track And runs it, round and round.

The tall fleet cur, with deep-mouthed voice, Now speeds him, as the wind; While half-grown pup, and short-legged fice, Are yelping far behind.

And fresh recruits are dropping in To join the merry corps: With yelp and yell,--a mingled din--The woods are in a roar.

And round, and round the chace now goes, The world's alive with fun; Nick Carter's horse, his rider throws, And more, Hill drops his gun.

Now sorely pressed, bear glances back, And lolls his tired tongue; When as, to force him from his track, An ambush on him sprung.

Across the glade he sweeps for flight, And fully is in view. The dogs, new-fired, by the sight, Their cry, and speed, renew.

The foremost ones, now reach his rear, He turns, they dash away; And circling now, the wrathful bear, They have him full at bay.

At top of speed, the horse-men come, All screaming in a row, "Whoop! Take him Tiger. Seize him Drum." Bang,--bang--the rifles go.

And furious now, the dogs he tears, And crushes in his ire, Wheels right and left, and upward rears, With eyes of burning fire.

But leaden death is at his heart, Vain all the strength he plies. And, spouting blood from every part, He reels, and sinks, and dies.

And now a dinsome clamor rose, 'Bout who should have his skin; Who first draws blood, each hunter knows, This prize must always win.

But who did this, and how to trace What's true from what's a lie, Like lawyers, in a murder case They stoutly argufy.

Aforesaid fice, of blustering mood, Behind, and quite forgot, Just now emerging from the wood, Arrives upon the spot.

With grinning teeth, and up-turned hair--Brim full of spunk and wrath, He growls, and seizes on dead bear, And shakes for life and death.

And swells as if his skin would tear, And growls and shakes again; And swears, as plain as dog can swear, That he has won the skin. Conceited whelp! we laugh at thee--Nor mind, that now a few Of pompous, two-legged dogs there be, Conceited quite as you.

The Suicide's Soliloquy

Here, where the lonely hooting owl Sends forth his midnight moans, Fierce wolves shall o'er my carcase growl, Or buzzards pick my bones. No fellow-man shall learn my fate, Or where my ashes lie; Unless by beasts drawn round their bait, Or by the ravens' cry. Yes! I've resolved the deed to do, And this the place to do it: This heart I'll rush a dagger through, Though I in hell should rue it! Hell! What is hell to one like me Who pleasures never know; By friends consigned to misery, By hope deserted too? To ease me of this power to think, That through my bosom raves, I'll headlong leap from hell's high brink, And wallow in its waves. Though devils yell, and burning chains May waken long regret; Their frightful screams, and piercing pains, Will help me to forget. Yes! I'm prepared, through endless night, To take that fiery berth! Think not with tales of hell to fright Me, who am damn'd on earth! Sweet steel! come forth from our your sheath, And glist'ning, speak your powers; Rip up the organs of my breath, And draw my blood in showers! I strike! It guivers in that heart Which drives me to this end; I draw and kiss the bloody dart, My last—my only friend!

To Linnie

A sweet plaintive song did I hear, And I fancied that she was the singer— May emotions as pure, as that song set a-stir Be the worst that the future shall bring her.

To Rosa

You are young, and I am older; You are hopeful, I am not -Enjoy life, ere it grow colder -Pluck the roses ere they rot.

Teach your beau to heed the lay -That sunshine soon is lost in shade -That now's as good as any day -To take thee, Rosa, ere she fade.

Verse On Lee's Invasion Of The North

Gen. Lees invasion of the North written by himself—

In eighteen sixty three, with pomp, and mighty swell,
Me and Jeff's Confederacy, went forth to sack Phil-del,
The Yankees the got arter us, and giv us particular hell,
And we skedaddled back again,
And didn't sack Phil-del.