

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Benjamin Franklin King**

**- poems -**

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### **Benjamin Franklin King (March 17, 1857- November 27, 1883)**

King was born at St. Joseph, Michigan, March 17, 1857, and died while on a speaking tour at Bowling Green, Kentucky, April 7, 1894. He was married November 27, 1883 to Aseneth Belle Latham, of St. Joseph, Michigan, and the couple had two children, Bennett Latham King and Spencer P. King, aged nine and five, respectively, at the time of his death.

King billed himself as "Ben King, the Sweet Singer of St. Joe". He first came to prominence for a concert given during the World's Columbian Exposition. Introduced to the Press Club of Chicago, he was quickly picked up by Opie Read, who invited King to tour with him, reading his poetry with piano accompaniment.

According to a short biography by Opie Read, as a child he was reputed a piano prodigy; in adult life he was by many deemed a failure for his lack of business instinct. But as a poet, a gentle satirist and a humorist of the highest order, he achieved notability in his short life for a series of newspaper published poems. He appears to have been a favorite of the Press Club of Chicago, and that organisation published a posthumous collection of his works, *Ben King's verse*, in 1894, comparing him with Thomas Hood, a then famous English humorist and poet. In the next quarter century, the book reputedly outsold any other single volume of verses in Michigan.

He is buried in the St. Joseph City Cemetery. A monument erected in Lake Bluff Park, Berrien County, Michigan in 1924 features a bronze bust of King created by Chicago sculptor Leonard Crunelle. On the granite monument base are lines from his poem "The River St. Joe":

Where the bumblebee sips and the clover's in bloom,  
and the zephyr's come laden with peachblow perfume.

Where the thistle-down pauses in search of the rose  
and the myrtle and woodbine and wild ivy grows;

Oh, give me the spot that I once used to know  
by the side of the placid old River St. Joe!

## How Often

They stood on the bridge at midnight,  
In a park not far from town;  
They stood on the bridge at midnight  
Because they didn't sit down.  
The moon rose o'er the city  
Behind the dark church spire;  
The moon rose o'er the city  
And kept on rising higher.  
How often, oh! how often  
They whispered words so soft;  
How often, oh! how often,  
How often, oh! how oft.

Benjamin Franklin King

## **If I should die**

1 If I should die to-night  
2 And you should come to my cold corpse and say,  
3 Weeping and heartsick o'er my lifeless clay --  
4 If I should die to-night,  
5 And you should come in deepest grief and woe --  
6 And say: "Here's that ten dollars that I owe,"  
7 I might arise in my large white cravat  
8 And say, "What's that?"

9 If I should die to-night  
10 And you should come to my cold corpse and kneel,  
11 Clasp my bier to show the grief you feel,  
12 I say, if I should die to-night  
13 And you should come to me, and there and then  
14 Just even hint 'bout payin' me that ten,  
15 I might arise the while,  
16 But I'd drop dead again.

Benjamin Franklin King

## Injun Summah

1 De Injun summah's comin',  
2 De bees is all froo hummin',  
3 De watah-mellon thumbin'  
4 Has passed long time ago.  
5 De ole clock in de kitchen  
6 Is tickin' mos' bewitchin',  
7 While Gabe is out unhitchin'  
8 Just kase it looks like snow.

9 De lambs is runnin' over  
10 De aftahmath ob clovah,  
11 An' yondah comes de drovah;  
12 I 'spec he' got a yahn  
13 About de ole bell-weddah  
14 Dat's wand'rin roun' de meddah  
15 An' wants ter git togeddah  
16 Wid de sheep up roun' de bahn.

17 Some days de sun is shinin',  
18 Some days de win' is whinin',  
19 An' den I'se after fin'in'  
20 Big pippins on de groun';  
21 De birds hab all stopped singin',  
22 Wil' geese is soufward wingin',  
23 Jes' look an' see 'em stringin'  
24 Whar warmah weddah's foun'.

25 De yaller cat is nappin'  
26 En layin' roun' an' gappin';  
27 Bimeby he will be slappin'  
28 Some tom-cat on de wall.  
29 Dar's a mellah, yella glory  
30 Kase de yeah is ol' an' ho'ry,  
31 An' a melancholy story  
32 So't o' hangin' roun' us all.

Benjamin Franklin King

## The Pessimist

- 1 Nothing to do but work,  
2 Nothing to eat but food,  
3 Nothing to wear but clothes  
4 To keep one from going nude.
- 5 Nothing to breathe but air  
6 Quick as a flash 't is gone;  
7 Nowhere to fall but off,  
8 Nowhere to stand but on.
- 9 Nothing to comb but hair,  
10 Nowhere to sleep but in bed,  
11 Nothing to weep but tears,  
12 Nothing to bury but dead.
- 13 Nothing to sing but songs,  
14 Ah, well, alas! alack!  
15 Nowhere to go but out,  
16 Nowhere to come but back.
- 17 Nothing to see but sights,  
18 Nothing to quench but thirst,  
19 Nothing to have but what we've got;  
20 Thus thro' life we are cursed.
- 21 Nothing to strike but a gait;  
22 Everything moves that goes.  
23 Nothing at all but common sense  
24 Can ever withstand these woes.

Benjamin Franklin King

## Toboggan

1 Down from the hills and over the snow  
2 Swift as a meteor's flash we go,  
3 Toboggan! Toboggan! Toboggan!  
4 Down from the hills with our senses lost,  
5 Jealous of cheeks that are kissed by the frost,  
6 Toboggan! Toboggan! Toboggan!

7 With snow piled high on housetop and hill,  
8 O'er frozen rivulet, river, and rill,  
9 Clad in her jacket of sealskin and fur,  
10 Down from the hills I'm sliding with her,  
11 Toboggan! Toboggan! Toboggan!

12 Down from the hills, what an awful speed!  
13 As if on the back of a frightened steed,  
14 Toboggan! Toboggan! Toboggan!  
15 Down from the hills at the rise of the moon,  
16 Merrily singing the toboggan tune,  
17 "Toboggan! Toboggan! Toboggan!"

18 Down from the hills like an arrow we fly,  
19 Or a comet that whizzes along through the sky;  
20 Down from the hills! Oh, isn't it grand!  
21 Clasp your best winter girl by the hand,  
22 Toboggan! Toboggan! Toboggan!

23 Down from the hills and both growing old,  
24 Down from the hills we are nearing the fold:  
25 Toboggan! Toboggan! Toboggan!  
26 Close to the homestead we hear the ring  
27 Of children's voices that cheerily sing,  
28 "Toboggan! Toboggan! Toboggan!"

29 Down from the hills and we hear the chime  
30 Of bells that are ringing out Old Father Time;  
31 Down from the hills we are riding away,  
32 Nearing the life with its endless day;  
33 Toboggan! Toboggan! Toboggan!

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