

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

No. 368

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

April 27, 1936

REMINISCENCES OF MY BOYHOOD DAYS—A. LINCOLN

In the Fall of 1844, I went into the neighborhood in which I was raised, where my mother and only sister were buried, and from which I had been absent about fifteen years. That part of the country is within itself as un-poetical as any spot on the earth, but still, seeing it and its objects and inhabitants, aroused feelings in me which were certainly poetry, though whether my expression of those feelings is poetry is quite another question. This piece of poetry of my own I was led to write:

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,
Seen 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-notes 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 naught 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.

When I visited my old home in the Fall of 1844 I found an insane man, Matthew Gentry, still lingering in this wretched condition. He is three years older than I, and when we were boys we went to school together. He was rather a bright lad, and the son of a rich man of a very poor neighborhood. At the age of nineteen he unaccountably became furiously mad, from which condition he gradually settled down into harmless insanity. In my poetizing mood, I could not forget the impression his case made upon me. Here is the result:

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

When terror spread, and neighbors ran
Your dangerous 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 eyeballs glared;

And begged and swore, and wept and prayed
With maniac laughter joined;
How fearful were these signs displayed
By pangs that killed the mind!

And when at length the drear and long
Time soothed 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 its strains I've stole away,
All stealthily and still,
Ere yet the rising god of day
Had streaked the eastern hill.

Air held her breath; trees with the spell
Seemed sorrowing angels round,
Whose swelling tears in dewdrops fell
Upon the listening ground.

But this is past, and naught remains
That raised thee o'er the brute;
Thy piercing shrieks and soothing strain
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 thou tear more blest ones hence,
And leave him lingering here?

Another, the subject a "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 woe 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 this 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 enger pack,
Bear shuns the open ground;
Through 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 chase now goes,
The world's alive with fun:
Nick Carters' horse his rider throws,
And Mose Hill drops his gun—

Now sorely pressed, bear glances back,
And lolls his tired tongue
When is, 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, now-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 horsemen 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 argify.

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 not a few
Of pompous, two-legged dogs there be,
Conceited quite as you.

Editor's Note—This number of Lincoln Lore contains the third of a series of autobiographical sketches compiled from the writings of Abraham Lincoln which will appear from time to time in this bulletin. Every word used is just as Lincoln wrote it with the exception of substituting the first person for the third person as used by Lincoln in the sketch he prepared for John L. Scripps in 1859. L. A. W.