

LINCOLN LORE

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN: POET

A manuscript in Abraham Lincoln's own hand which has recently been presented to the Library of Congress by Mary Lincoln Isham of Washington is of intense interest to Lincoln students, as it reveals how Lincoln's choice of words improved when he could give some time and attention to his written compositions.

Upon visiting his old home in Indiana in 1844 he was stirred to write some poetry which evidently he jotted down hastily. An occasion arose, however, for him to submit the poetry to a friend which caused him to go over the manuscript carefully, dividing the long poem into two cantos.

Copies of the two revised cantos have been published, but now for the first time the original and uncorrected manuscript is available. Four new stanzas of poetry which Lincoln failed to include in his revised writing are now presented, and it is also discovered that he wrote one new stanza, not appearing in the original, to conclude one of the cantos after the revision was made.

After reading the first draft of the part of the poem relating to the insane youth, Matthew Gentry, one is deeply impressed by Lincoln's reaction to the tragedy of his school companion.

It also appears from this manuscript as if his poem on "The Bear Hunt" was also a part of the original composition. The two concluding stanzas seem to be transition verses which anticipate the writing of a more pleasant theme—

"And now away to seek some scene
Less painful than the last."

Lincoln left unchanged the word joined—pronounced by him "jined" to rime with mind—indicating that as late as 1844 it was in good usage in his vocabulary at least.

The text as Lincoln first wrote it is herewith presented. The words which were discarded for more satisfactory ones are placed in italics and the substituted expressions are to be found in the footnotes.

My childhood home I see again	1	<i>Poor Matthew, I have ne'er forgot</i>	49
And gladden with the view,	2	<i>When first with maddened will</i>	50
And still as <i>mem'ries crowd</i> my brain	3	<i>Yourself you maimed, your father fought,</i>	51
There's <i>sadness</i> in it too.	4	<i>Your mother strove to kill.</i>	52
O Memory, thou midway world	5	And terror spread and neighbors ran	53
Twixt earth and paradise,	6	Your dang'rous strength to bind,	54
Where things decayed and loved ones lost	7	And soon a howling crazy man	55
In dreamy shadows rise,	8	Your limbs were fast confined,	56
And freed from all that's <i>gross or vile,</i>	9	How then you <i>writhed</i> and shrieked aloud	57
Seems hallowed, pure and bright	10	Your bones and sinews bared,	58
Like scenes in some enchanted vale	11	And fendish on the <i>gaping</i> crowd	59
All bathed in liquid light.	12	With burning eye-balls glared,	60
As <i>distant</i> mountains please the eye	13	And begged and swore and wept and prayed	61
When twilight chases day	14	With maniac laughter <i>joined;</i>	62
As <i>brighter tones</i> that, passing by,	15	How painful <i>are the pains</i> displayed	63
In distance die away;	16	By pangs that kill the mind.	64
As leaving some grand waterfall	17	And when at length, <i>tho drear</i> and long	65
We lingering list its roar	18	Time soothed <i>your fiercer</i> woes,	66
So memory will hallow all	19	How plaintively <i>your mournful</i> song	67
We've known, but know no more	20	Upon the still night rose.	68
<i>Now</i> twenty years have passed away	21	I've heard it oft as if I dreamed,	69
Since here I <i>bade</i> farewell	22	Far distant, sweet and lone.	70
To woods, to <i>field</i> and scenes of play	23	The funeral dirge it ever seemed	71
And <i>schoolmates</i> loved so well.	24	Of reason dead and gone.	72
Where many were <i>how few</i> remain	25	To drink its <i>drams</i> I've stole away,	73
Of old familiar things,	26	All <i>silently</i> and still,	74
But seeing <i>these</i> to mind again	27	Ere yet the rising God of Day	75
The lost and absent brings.	28	Had streaked the eastern hill.	76
The friends I left that parting day,	29	Air held <i>its</i> breath and <i>trees all still</i>	77
How changed, as time has sped;	30	Seemed sorrowing angels round;	78
Young childhood <i>gone,</i> strong manhood	31	<i>Their</i> swelling tears in dewdrops fell	79
gray,	32	Upon the list'ning ground.	80
And half of all are dead.			
I hear the <i>lone</i> survivors tell	33	But this is past and naught remains	81
How naught from death could save.	34	That raised <i>you</i> o'er the brute;	82
Till every sound appears a knell,	35	Your <i>maddening</i> shrieks and soothing	83
And every spot a grave.	36	strains,	84
		Are like forever mute.	
I range the fields with pensive tread,	37	Now fare thee well, more thou the cause	85
I pace the hollow rooms.	38	Than subject now of woe;	86
And feel, companion of the dead,	39	All mental pangs by time's kind <i>hand</i>	87
I'm living in <i>their</i> tombs.	40	Hast lost the power to know.	88
And here's an object more of dread	41	<i>And now away to seek some scene</i>	89
Than aught the grave contains,	42	<i>Less painful than the last</i>	90
A human form with reason fled	43	<i>With less of horror mingled in</i>	91
While wretched life remains.	44	<i>The present and the past.</i>	92
<i>Poor Matthew, once of genius bright,</i>	45	<i>The very spot where grew the bread</i>	93
<i>A fortune-favored child,</i>	46	<i>That formed my bones I see,</i>	94
<i>Now locked for aye in mental night,</i>	47	<i>How strange old field on thee to tread</i>	95
<i>A haggard madman wild.</i>	48	<i>And feel I'm part of thee.</i>	96

1. childhood's	23. and fields	45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50,	73. strains	89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, omitted from the
2. sadden	24. playmate	51, 52—omitted	74. stealthily	original text with the following new con-
3. memory crowds	25. but	57. strove	77. her—"trees with	cluding stanza substituted:
4. pleasure	27. them	59. gazing	the spell"	
9. earthly	31. grown	62. pronounced fined	79. whose	"O death! Thou awe-inspiring prince
11. isle	33. loved	—did not change	82. thee	That keptst the world in fear
13. dusky	38. and	63. were these signs	83. piercing	Why dost thou tear more blest ones hence
15. bugle notes	40. the	65. the	87. laws	And leave him lingering here."
21. near	41. but	66. thy		
22. bid	43. the	67. thy		