

LINCOLN LORE

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THE POETS LINCOLN ADMIRERD

Poems about Lincoln are legion, and nearly everyone who has a poetic gift combined with an appreciation of the martyred President seems to have penned verses about the President at some time or other. There are many discussions about Lincoln's own poetic expressions, and students of the Emancipator are familiar with the various poems which he wrote. Not very much has been written, however, about the poets whom Lincoln seemed to admire above others.

One might choose the following six poets as those most greatly admired by Lincoln, although one or two of them may have written but a single canto which would allow them to qualify in this list: Shakespeare, Knox, Burns, Halleck, Holmes, and Hood.

William Shakespeare

It seems as if Shakespeare rather stands out among the master poets Lincoln admired. It would be difficult to choose just those lines of the poet which Lincoln appreciated most, though an excerpt from a note to Hackett would seem to approach an estimate of the comparative values of Shakespeare's works from Lincoln's viewpoint: "I think nothing equals *Macbeth*. I think it is wonderful." It is evident that Lincoln was a life-long reader of Shakespeare and he states that he had gone over some of the plays "perhaps as frequently as any other unprofessional reader."

William Knox

Possibly one should also mention William Knox, the author of "Mortality," for although Lincoln was not aware of the authorship of the poem, it was his favorite. It is not known that he ever read any other poem by Knox. It will be recalled that Lincoln wrote to a friend in 1846 by way of comment on "Mortality," "I would give all I am worth and go in debt, to be able to write so fine a piece as I think that is. Neither do I know who is the author."

Robert Burns

In 1860 Abraham Lincoln wrote the following to his friend James G. Wilson who had advised the Presidential nominee that he had some acquaintance with the Burns family: "It is

wonderful that you should have seen and known a sister of Robert Burns. You must tell me something about her when we meet again." There is a tradition rather widely accepted that Lincoln attended an annual meeting

Man's a Man for A' That," "Tam O'Shanter," and especially "Holy Willie's Prayer."

Fitz Greene Halleck

In April 1860 Abraham Lincoln remarked to James Grant Wilson in Chicago that his favorite authors were Shakespeare and Burns. Wilson sent a copy of Halleck's poems to Lincoln which contained a fine tribute to Burns. In the acknowledgment of the book Lincoln stated: "Many a month has passed since I have met with anything more admirable than his beautiful lines on Burns. With Alnwick Castle, Marco Bozzaris, and Red Jacket, I am also much pleased." When Lincoln visited the Army of the Potomac he carried a copy of Halleck's poems with him and read selections from it for those in the Presidential party.

Oliver Wendell Holmes

According to Henry C. Whitney, "The Last Leaf" by Oliver Wendell Holmes was the favorite of all the pathetic poems which struck a responsive chord in Lincoln's nature. In a conversation with F. B. Carpenter, the portrait painter, Lincoln remarked that one verse of this poem which begins "The mossy marbles rest . . ." was to him inexpressibly touching. He is said to have concluded with reference to these lines, "For pure pathos, in my judgment, there is nothing finer than those six lines, in the English language."

Thomas Hood

John Hay, secretary of the President, comments that Lincoln was "excessively fond" of Thomas Hood's poetry, particularly of his poem "The Haunted House." Hay also stated that Lincoln "would go to bed with a volume of Hood in his hands." William Browning who visited Lincoln on the evening of April 25, 1862, stated that the President read several selections from Hood, including "The Haunted House" and "The Lost Heir."

There are a few favorite poems of Lincoln by other writers which should have mention: Byron's "Childe Harold," Homer's "Illiad" and "Odyssey," Longfellow's "The Building of the Ship," Mackay's "The Enquirer," Pope's "Essay on Man," and Read's "The Patriot's Oath."

Poets Whose Works Lincoln Read

Browning, Robert
Bryant, William Cullen
Burns, Robert
Byron, Lord
Campbell, Thomas
Cook, Eliza
Cowper, William
Croker, Crofton
Goldsmith, Oliver
Gray, Thomas
Halleck, Fitz Greene
Herrick, Robert
Holmes, Oliver Wendell
Homer
Hood, Thomas
Knox, William
Leslie, John M.
Longfellow, Henry W.
Lowell, James Russell
Mackay, Charles
Milton, John
Moore, Thomas
Peterson, H.
Poe, Edgar Allen
Pope, Alexander
Read, Thomas B.
Rogers, Samuel
Shakespeare, William
Southey, Robert
Whitman, Walt
Whittier, John G.
Willis, Nathaniel Parker
Young, Edward

of the Burns' Club of Washington and was asked to give a toast to the poet. This is said to be a penciled notation of what he wrote: "I cannot frame a toast to Burns. I can say nothing worthy of his generous heart and transcending genius; thinking of what he has said, I cannot say anything which seems worth saying."

Among the lines of Burns which Lincoln admired greatly were "A