



# Lincoln Lore

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## WHEN THE LONDON PUNCH ATE HUMBLE PIE

When the editorial staff of the magazine, *London Punch*, the well known English comic weekly, met to discuss their forthcoming May 6, 1865 issue, they were suffering from shock occasioned by the news of President Abraham Lincoln's assassination. The problem confronting the magazine staff was to best determine how they would handle this distressing circumstance. Up to this time Lincoln had been the "favorite butt of *Punch's* wrathful humor." Shirley Brooks, one of the editors, was opposed to the publication of Tom Taylor's\* poem, "Abraham Lincoln—Fouly Assassinated, April 14, 1865." The magazine had never been overly friendly to America and Americans were always seen with London eyes and judged by London standards.

Throughout the Civil War the editors of *Punch* scolded both sides. As anti-slavery advocates they could not endorse the Southern slave owners. As upholders of free trade they could not endorse the North. Until the battle of Bull Run *Punch* preserved a fair appearance of neutrality. Then their attitude veered toward the South. This attitude was maintained by the numerous disasters to Federal arms, which seemed to point to an inevitable victory for the Confederacy.

When the cotton blockade paralyzed some of the most important English industries, John Bull roared because his pocket-book was hit, and *Punch* roared in sympathetic agreement. Sometimes *Punch* "took occasion to lecture both sides from the standpoint of a disinterested and superior friend who saw that neither side was absolutely and unconditionally right."

Brooks, who would not become the chief editor until 1870, was outvoted by other members of *Punch's* staff as well as by Mark Lemon who served as chief editor from 1841 to 1870, and the exquisitely moving poem was scheduled for publication. The verses were a complete recantation of *Punch's* former misunderstanding and wrongdoing, and from that time forward the magazine's editors took seriously to heart the lessons they had learned, and their references to the United States were thereafter more cordial and kind.

Certainly, the Taylor poem made a profound and deep impression upon American readers and in fact was instrumental in bringing about better relations between the Washington government and Great Britain. The poem follows:

\* Tom Taylor (1817-1880), editor of *Punch* (1874-1880) wrote or adapted over one hundred dramatic pieces, including "Our American Cousin" produced in 1858 in New York City by Laura Keane, in which E. A. Sothern created the role of Lord Dundreary. The comedy poked fun at Yankee traits. It was this play that Lincoln was witnessing at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. the evening of April 14, 1865, at which time he was assassinated.

Abraham Lincoln  
Fouly Assassinated, April 14, 1865

You lay a wreath on murdered LINCOLN'S bier,  
You, who with mocking pencil went to trace,  
Broad for the self-complacent British sneer,  
His length of shambling limb, his furrowed face,  
His gaunt, gnarled hands, his unkempt, bristling hair,  
His garb uncouth, his bearing ill at ease,  
His lack of all we prize as debonair  
Of power or will to shine, of art to please.  
You, whose smart pen backed up the pencil's laugh,  
Judging each step, as though the way were plain:  
Reckless, so it could point its paragraph,  
Of chief's perplexity, or people's pain.  
Beside this corpse that bears for winding-sheet  
The Stars and Stripes he lived to rear anew,  
Between the mourners at his head and feet,  
Say, scurril-jester, is there room for you?  
Yes, he had lived to shame me from my sneer,  
To lame my pencil, and confute my pen —  
To make me own this hind of princes peer,  
This rail-splitter a true-born king of men.  
My shallow judgment I had learnt to rue,  
Noting how to occasion's height he rose,  
How his quaint wit made home-truth seem more true,  
How, iron-like, his temper grew by blows.  
How humble yet how hopeful he could be:  
How in good fortune and in ill the same:  
Nor bitter in success, nor boastful he,  
Thirsty for gold, nor feverish for fame.  
He went about his work — such work as few  
Ever had laid on head and heart and hand —  
As one who knows, where there's a task to do,  
Man's honest will must Heaven's good grace command;  
Who trusts the strength will with the burden grow,  
That God makes instruments to work his will,  
If but that will we can arrive to know,  
Nor tamper with the weights of good and ill.  
So he went forth to battle, on the side  
That he felt clear was Liberty's and Right's,  
As in his peasant boyhood he had plied  
His warfare with rude Nature's thwarting mights —  
The uncleared forest, the unbroken soil,  
The iron-bark, that turns the lumberer's axe,  
The rapid, that o'erbears the boatman's toil,  
The prairie, hiding the mazed wanderer's tracks,



The ambushed Indian, and the prowling bear —  
 Such were the needs that helped his youth to train:  
 Rough culture — but such trees large fruit may bear,  
 If but their stocks be of right girth and grain.  
 So he grew up, a destined work to do,  
 And lived to do it: four long-suffering years'  
 Ill-fate, ill-feeling, ill-report, lived through,  
 And then he heard the hisses change to cheers,  
 The taunts to tribute, the abuse to praise,  
 And took both with the same unwavering mood:  
 Till, as he came on light, from darkling days,  
 And seemed to touch the goal from where he stood,  
 A felon hand, between the goal and him,  
 Reached from behind his back, a trigger prest, —  
 And those perplexed and patient eyes were dim,  
 Those gaunt, long-labouring limbs were laid to rest!  
 The words of mercy were upon his lips,  
 Forgiveness in his heart and on his pen,  
 When this vile murderer brought swift eclipse  
 To thoughts of peace on earth, good-will to men.  
 The Old World and the New, from sea to sea,  
 Utter one voice of sympathy and shame!  
 Sore heart, so stopped when it at last beat high,  
 Sad life, cut short just as its triumph came.  
 A deed accurst! Strokes have been struck before  
 By the assassin's hand, whereof men doubt  
 If more of horror or disgrace they bore;  
 But thy foul crime, like CAIN'S, stands darkly out,  
 Vile hand, that brandest murder on a strife,  
 Whate'er its grounds, stoutly and nobly striven;  
 And with the martyr's crown crownest a life  
 With much to praise, little to be forgiven!

Not only did the May 6, 1865 issue of *Punch* carry the Taylor poem but the entire page of 183 was given over to John Tenniel's classic cartoon, "Brittania Sympathises with Columbia." Here the artist made personal amends by drawing a sympathetic picture of Britain paying homage at the bedside of the fallen leader. Tenniel was often assigned to execute drawings reflecting high comedy and not infrequently tragedy. Tenniel's work has been appraised as revealing "accuracy of drawing, precision of touch, grace and dignity of conception, and — so far as such things can be compatible — geniality of satire. Tenniel raised the political cartoon into a classic composition, from which a sense of nobility is rarely absent." Certainly, his "Brittania Sympathises with Columbia" will rank among the best of his 2,300 cartoons, and his innumerable drawings and designs.\*

While *Punch* was not a news weekly, the May 6 issue carried the following statement regarding Lincoln's assassination:

"In the middle of this day (Wednesday) arrived the news that Abraham Lincoln, the honest, kind-hearted, resolute President of the United States, had been foully murdered in a theatre at Washington on Good Friday last. It is not in this place that an attempt should be made to describe the fierce indignation felt all over this land, or the deep sympathy which was so promptly testified towards our American brethren. But it is part of the Parliamentary story that the Commons assembled to-day hastened to sign an address of execration and condolence, and to present it to the American Minister."

Another entry in *Punch* regarding Lincoln's assassination follows:

\*Another great cartoon by Sir John Tenniel appeared in 1890 entitled "Dropping the Pilot."

"The Lords re-assembled (Thursday), and Earl Russell instantly gave notice that on the following Monday he should move an Address expressive of sorrow and indignation at the murder of Mr. Lincoln. Earl Derby said that such an expression would not only meet the unanimous assent of the Peers of England, but would represent the feelings of every man, woman, and child in Her Majesty's dominions. In the Commons, Sir George Grey gave a similar notice."

This was not the first time that Abraham Lincoln had been mentioned in *Punch*. He made his first appearance in a cartoon entitled "The American Difficulty" in the May 11, 1861 issue. The newly elected (beardless) President was depicted before a smoking, sooty fireplace stoking the fire. The caption is "What a Nice White House This Would Be If It Were Not For the Blacks." This cartoon revealed Lincoln to be a man of clean-cut intelligent features which would be in marked contrast to subsequent cartoons which depicted him with a gorilla-like countenance. After the Trent Affair, the Tenniel cartoons "rose to the higher level of just indignation." In other words, *Punch* declared war on Lincoln with pen and ink.

As events in Lincoln's presidential career transpired, he was presented numerous times in Tenniel's cartoons in *Punch* as a mean, sniveling, vascillating and contemptuous leader. He was often revealed as a bearded ruffian, a vulgar charlatan and a repulsive beast. One writer stated that "they messed up his hair till it became a shaggy mane — they twisted his face into a sinister look, and they broke his back till he sagged like a gorilla."

Not only were the artists cruel in their caricatures of the Sixteenth President, but the staff writers of *Punch* were equally unkind. In their December 19, 1864 issue they wrote a fictitious, brutal and burlesque address which was entitled, "Lincoln's Inaugural Speech By Ultramarine Telegraph." This affront was all the more obvious because Lincoln's March 4, 1865 inaugural address was soon accorded a place among the great masterpieces of forensic English. Oddly enough, *Punch* had applauded Lincoln's statements concerning secession in his First Inaugural Address.

As a magazine, *Punch* or *The London Charivari* served (and still serves for that matter) a worthwhile purpose. In England it was a power and usually a power for good. It first appeared on July 17, 1841 as an English comic weekly, and it eventually became the most famous journal of its kind — in fact, it was a recognized organ of British laughter, and it represented or aimed to represent the better part of the English people. Its articles, cartoons and drawings laughed out of the court various shams, fads, affectations and forms of ostentation. *Punch* or *Punchinello* was assumed to be a real personality — a "laughing philosopher and man of letters, the essence of all wit and the concentration of all wisdom."

To the credit of its editors the magazine did not deviate from its purpose, remaining wholly free from party bias.

As stated before, the magazine's editors were not overly friendly to the United States, and in a prospectus issued in 1845 it was expressly announced that the Journal was to be devoted in part to "Yankee Yarns" and to "the Naturalization of those alien Jonathans whose adherence to the truth had forced them to emigrate from their native land."

Apparently the editors grew tired of the military aspect

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## BRITANNIA SYMPATHISES WITH COLUMBIA.



Sir John Tenniel (1820-1914) who drew this cartoon "Britannia Sympathises With Columbia" was long identified with *Punch*, having been invited in 1850 by Mark Lemon (Editor) to fill the position of joint cartoonist with John Leech, in succession to Richard Doyle.



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of the American Civil War, and they made no allusions to the great Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg. Their cartoons, many of them depicting Lincoln, dealt primarily with conflicts between the United States and England, international affairs, the cotton blockade, business problems, the national debt, the Trent Affair, the military situation, slavery, emancipation, neutrality and peace. Often Tenniel would depict an American character in his cartoons wearing the Uncle Sam garb but with Lincoln's face. Many times completely unidentified characters in the cartoons would bear a resemblance to the Sixteenth President.

So the publication of the Tom Taylor poem, the John Tenniel cartoon and the news releases concerning the Lincoln assassination was a turning point in the editorial policy of the *Punch* staff. But this about-face was not easy and the readers of the famous May 6, 1865 number had no insight into what went on behind the scenes. Years later it would be revealed that Shirley Brooks made the following entry in his diary:

"Dined *Punch*. All there. Let out my views against some verses on Lincoln in which T. T. (Tom Taylor) had not only made P (*Punch*) eat humble pie, but swallow dish and all."

### Vanity Fair and Abraham Lincoln

The editors of the magazine *Punch* were never very kind to Abraham Lincoln during his lifetime, and neither were the editors of *Vanity Fair*. This humorous and satirical paper, published once a week in New York City, had as its objective, "reformation." The editors had what the French call "an iron hand in a velvet glove." In their preface to Volume One (1860), they declared war on "political tricksters, venal editors, public charlatans, silly authors, and all people whose stupidity necessitates their being treated as criminals." *Vanity Fair* editors claimed to be devoted to the cause of "Truth and Virtue" and they proposed to do reverence to Merit."

Apparently the V. F. editors saw little merit in the candidacy of Lincoln for the Presidency of the United States on the Republican ticket. In fact, in their preface to Volume Three (1861) the statement was made that they "did not help Linc — on." The first *Vanity Fair* article, (a full page Lincoln cartoon appeared in the June 9, 1860 number) devoted to Lincoln appeared on page 389 of the June 16, 1860 issue:

Life of Lincoln (Abraham) The Chicago Nominee Compiled From the Most Reliable Authorities.

"Hearing that a biography of the Republican Candidate for the Presidency was in preparation, we resolved to forestal this tardy volume, by a brief, clear, full, succinct, comprehensive, detailed outline of Mr. LINCOLN'S career, from his birth up to an indefinite period of his existence, including his last will and testament, dying confession, and tragic end, with many other pleasing incidents of his checkered life. To this end, we employed a young gentleman of the V. F. corps, who already bids fair to rival the profound and versatile SYLVANUS EVERETT of the '*Ledger*' in his brilliant originality, and intelligent zeal for searching hidden lore; and after visiting the treasuries of art, science and literature entombed in the cloisters of the western flatboats, explored the monuments mouldering along the fence-lines of Illinois, interrogated the almanacs, examined the mileage-accounts at Washington, looked through all Reynold's, Cooper's, Duma's, Cobb's,

and Lippard's works, and analytically studied WORCESTER'S (Best) Quarto Dictionary — after all this labor, we say, our Biographer has compiled the following eminently satisfactory (to himself) and remarkable History of the Incorruptible Nominee of the Republican Party. *To Wit*:

ABRAHAM LINCOLN was the eldest of three brothers, respectively called ISAAC and JACOB, and was, with them, though not at the same time, born on the left bank of the Nile, B. C. 3001. Of his early life little is known, though it is believed he once made himself precociously famous by attempting to dam up the waters of his native river with bull-rushes. At the age of eighteen, ABRAHAM built a flatboat, and gathering his family round him, bade them a tender adieu, and started, well provisioned with 'old wheat' (mummy-wheat, probably) and 'fixins' to discover a wider field for his genius. After a tedious voyage sailing down the Nile to the Ganges, up the Ganges to the Danube, down the Danube to the Burrampooter, and down the Burrampooter to the Mississippi, he arrived 'much overcome' (the 'old wheat' having given out at this moment) in the State of Illinois, A. D. 1860, just in time to receive the nomination of the Republicans for President of the United States of America. During his adventurous voyage, he encountered many strange vicissitudes of fortune, some of which are not unworthy a passing notice. He was, for instance, in the early period of his voyage, hotly pursued, and frequently nearly overtaken by 'Faro,' of whom he was in fact a sort of slave. As he advanced, however, he gradually left this foe behind, and finally lost sight of him entirely. He also spent an indefinite time in the wilderness (but which wilderness, I have been unable to ascertain with certainty) where he subsisted wholly on senna-and-manna, and a very uncomfortable manner of life he found it. He was more than once furiously assaulted with a 'poker' by rival flatboatmen, and at other times with an 'old sledge,' both favorite weapons of that class. But he managed to retort successfully with 'rocks,' with which he was particularly familiar, having split them frequently, as well as rails, while in the wilderness in search of water, to soften his 'old wheat.' At one period of his trip, he was sorely worsted in a combat with a Little Giant, who liked to have finished his career by an untimely 'blow'. But he skilfully retreated behind a 'stump,' and left the field to his antagonist. He likewise suffered somewhat from an endemic disease common to certain parts of the U. S. called the Tariff, and is even to this day subject to its attacks, now and then. But the worst malady he has ever had to contend with is the Abolition Mania. This virulent plague has unfortunately taken root in his system, and will it is thought, eventually hurry him to a political grave. In person, ABRAHAM is a tallish, shortish, medium-sized sort of man. Not dark, nor yet light. Not very thin, nor very fat. Neither very ugly, nor very handsome. In short, a kind of a sort of a tolerably-looking-like-other-men-more-or-less species of man. Perhaps rather more than less. Age mediaeval. In conclusion, I would say that he is lamented by a wide circle of friends, among whom his admirable qualities were highly appreciated, and was then and there executed according to law made and provided, etc.

'Light lie the turf above thee,  
Friend of my early days, &c.'

My melancholy task is ended! V. F. BIOGRAPHER."