



Lincoln Lore

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THE BALLAD OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Editor's Note: *The Ballad Of Abraham Lincoln* is the title of an eight page pamphlet, 10" x 7¼", published by Fields, Osgood & Co., of Boston, Massachusetts. The publication bears no date or author's name and is not listed in Monaghan's *Lincoln Bibliography 1839-1939*. The ballad of eighty-six stanzas was likely written in 1869 as the statement is made in the fifth stanza, "He was born a settler's child, just sixty years ago." Perhaps the ballad was not published until the 1870s. As will be noted, the cover title of the Foundation's copy is badly mutilated, but the item, nevertheless, is considered to have exceptional bibliographical value.

COME, leave the tales you love so well,
Of fairy joy and woe;
Another story I shall tell
Of one whose name you know.

Like him who was a herdsman's son,
Yet lived to be a king,
His life the highest honor won
Our native land can bring.

His arm was strong, his heart was bold,
His deeds were wise and true;
He did not live in days of old,
But here at home with you.

And who he was, you can't forget;
You've surely guessed his name;
For all the land is ringing yet
With Abraham Lincoln's fame.

Away in old Kentucky's wild,
Where Nolin's waters flow,
There he was born, a settler's child,
Just sixty years ago.

From other settlements removed,
The Indian tribes were near,
And round his father's cabin roved
The brown bear and the deer.

Ah! little sport and little joy
In that lone place he knew;
A rugged, tanned, and barefoot boy,
A forest child, he grew.

One blessing, only, cheered his days,—
A mother, pale and fair,
With kinder heart and gentler ways
Than other women there.

She knew her boy; by many a touch
Of care and watchful love
She did her best — it was not much —
To guide him and improve.

No schools or books were there, to give
Instruction to the youth,
But yet she taught him how to live
In honesty and truth.

She taught him courage and content,
And patience under pain,
When they had left the settlement
To buy and build again.

And when, at last, the hardships broke
Her strength, awhile she lay:
Of love to God and man she spoke,
And then she passed away.

No church was in the solitudes,
Nor church-yard for the dead;
And so, amid the lonely woods,
They made the mother's bed.

And little Abraham, weeping there,
Cried: "Mother, I will be
In heart as true, in life as fair
As you have hoped of me!"



Beside that grave the boy began
To think, and work, and wait, —
To make himself an honest man
And worth a better fate.

Whatever offered to his hand,
On that he set his mind:
There was no boy in all the land
As ready and as kind.

For he would work through sun or snow,
And help, when there was need;
And many a mile he'd gladly go,
To find a book to read.

Few books there were could help impart,
Few teachers could he find:
It was his brave and patient heart
That helped his eager mind.

So year passed onward after year:
The boy grew tall and strong,
And bold of will, — his only fear
To do or suffer wrong.

And now the father, wandering west,
By better promise drawn,
Settled upon the prairie's breast
Beside the Sangamon.

They built themselves a cabin rough,
With walls of logs and clay:
The doors and seats were oak-wood tough,
The beds were prairie hay.

Around the chimney-place they drew
Content, when winter came:
The snow-flakes, whirling down the flue,
Died ere they reached the flame.

With scanty space and humblest cheer
The dreary days went by,
Till spring had thawed the frozen year
And warmed the gusty sky.

Then Abraham, strong from steady toil,
Went forth with axe in hand,
And while his father ploughed the soil
He fenced the prairie-land.

Tree after tree, he made them fall, —
The chestnuts, straight and thin:
With stalwart arm he swung the maul,
And drove the wedges in.

A fence around ten acres rose,
And they who saw it, say
That better, evener rails than those
No man can split to-day.

When all was finished, Abraham said:
"Now, Father, you've a home,
With wood and grass, and meat and bread,
So give me leave to roam!

"I'm twenty-one, and called a man,
And greater grows my need
(As 't was my own and mother's plan)
To be a man indeed!

"Whate'er I've learned, I'm far behind;
My chances here are few:
And, feed the body, starve the mind, —
That I shall never do!

"Whatever comes, I will not shirk
My duty clear and plain:
There must be knowledge, must be work,
Which such as I can gain!"

Then forth he went. 'T was hard at first
His bread alone to earn,
While more than hunger, more than thirst,
Was his desire to learn.

He felled the woods, he tilled the land, —
Hard work and little pay;
Yet honest heart and willing hand
Will always make their way.

The people found that he was true,
That toil to him was light, —
That what he promised he would do,
And what he did was right.

And soon a flat-boat, laden well,
They gave into his care,
To seek New Orleans, and to sell
The boat and cargo there.

So Abraham, with his river-boys,
Put off, and drifted slow
Past wooded bluffs of Illinois
And castled rocks below.

Missouri's mouth, that stains with mud
The Mississippi's wave,
They passed, and where Ohio's flood
Washes the pirate's cave: —

Where, westward, woods of cypress stand
In water to the knee:
Where, eastward, rolls the pleasant land
Of fertile Tennessee.

Where came, beyond the deserts born,
Arkansas, bright and blue:
Where Vicksburg rose against the morn,
Beside the dark Yazoo.

On — on, by sun or light of stars
 They plied the heavy oar;
 Looked out for snags and sandy bars,
 And kept away from shore.

So winding with the winding stream,
 Still warmer grew the air,
 And changed, as in a wondrous dream,
 The Southern Land was there!

They saw the rich magnolias grow,
 The planter's home to screen:
 The ripened cotton shone like snow,
 The orange groves were green.

Till every cypress swamp was passed,
 And every river bend;
 And at New Orleans' wharf, at last,
 The voyage had an end.

Then Abraham, faithful to his trust,
 The boat and cargo sold,
 And home on foot, through mud and dust,
 Brought safe the owner's gold.

So trusted afterwards was he,
 That all the work he sought
 Was offered him, with leisure free
 For reading and for thought.

At first, he kept the village store;
 But, as his knowledge grew,
 The people honored him the more,
 And loved, the more they knew.

And when the State election came
 For men to make the laws,
 They called on Abraham Lincoln's name
 To represent their cause.

In little things a man is tried
 Till he is fit for great;
 He served his friends, and they with pride
 Sent him to serve the State.

Of form uncouth and manners plain,
 Yet, when his voice they heard,
 Men felt how sound and clear his brain,
 And listened to his word.

Yet more he studied, further rose
 From out his place obscure,
 Till, working in the path he chose,
 He made his fortune sure.

The boy had grown indeed a man,
 In power and will complete:
 And now a broader life began
 To spread before his feet.

His talents first the neighbors knew;
 The county knew him then,
 And then the State; until he grew
 A guide to other men.

His voice was heard in stern debates
 Where, eloquent and brave,
 He claimed that all our coming States
 Should never hold a slave.

His words went ringing through the land
 So simple yet so strong,
 That soon they roused a mighty band
 To meet the threatened wrong.

It was not long before men said:
 "He shall our leader be:
 His honest heart and good, wise head
 Will bring us victory!"

They made him then their candidate,
 As best of all they knew:
 They thought: "So well he served his State,
 He'll serve his country too."

Look, where he stands! In thirty years
 Since forth from home he went,
 From East to West the people's cheers
 Hail Lincoln President!

In thirty years the poor young man,
 Whose chances seemed so dim,
 Stands foremost in the Nation's van,
 And all look up to him!

The chosen Chief, he journeyed on,
 Received with glad acclaim,
 Until to stately Washington
 Across the land he came.

There on the marble portico
 He took the solemn oath,
 No separate North or South to know,
 But justly govern both.

Alas! you know what followed then:
 How many, led astray
 By words and acts of wicked men,
 Brought on Fort Sumter's day.

Brought on the day that lit the land
 With war's devouring flame,
 Till North and South on every hand
 To siege and battle came.

You know it all: you can't forget
 The names of many a day,
 When, armed for death, our blue-coats met
 The Southern coats of gray.

You saw the Union's heroes go
 With trump and rattling drum:
 And then — in solemn march and slow,
 You saw their coffins come.

You saw the Nation spend its life,
 Its blood like water poured:
 You saw, thank God! to end the strife,
 The Union's power restored.

Ah, who can tell how Abraham felt
 Through all those fiery years!
 How many times to God he knelt,
 And prayed for help, with tears!

He said: "The sin of Slavery
 Has brought this war and woe:
 I now proclaim the black man free,
 And I will make him so!"

'T was done: thenceforth his path was bright,
 His cause, as all men saw,
 Was that of Freedom and of Right,
 Of Union and of Law.

God prospered him, and when his end
 Of service was at hand,
 The people cried: "He still must mend
 The troubles of our land."

They chose him: he renewed the oath
 Alike for North and South,
 And words that touched the hearts of both
 Came kindly from his mouth.

With firmness in the right we've won,
 We stand, whate'er befall,"
 Said he, — "with malice unto none,
 With charity for all.

"God has His own high purposes:
 As He wills, let it be!
 We pray the day may come that sees
 The land united, free!"

And scarce a month thereafter passed
 Before the earnest prayer
 Was heard, and victory came at last, —
 Yea, victory everywhere!

What shouts went up when Richmond fell!
 Grant took the sword of Lee,
 And trumpet, cannon, drum, and bell
 Announced, "The land is free!"

In Richmond streets among the first
 Was Abraham Lincoln then:
 He walked where late his name was cursed
 By desperate Southern men.

But, chanting their thanksgiving psalm,
 The slaves came, clamorous:
 They shouted: "God bless Abraham, —
 He has delivered us!"

They pressed around him as he went,
 They laughed and wept for joy, —
 The gray-haired negroes, worn and bent,
 The mother and her boy.

Though anxious years had made him sad,
 Yet tender was his eye,
 And, such an earnest face he had,
 Some knelt as he passed by.

Alas! as Moses on the height
 Saw Canaan, green and fair,
 He knew the truth, and saw the sight
 Of peace he could not share.

He heard the roar of battle die;
 The land no more was red;
 Then up to heaven there rang a cry: —
 "The President is dead!"

'T was thus, in his triumphal hour,
 The coward murderer came,
 And killed him at the height of power
 And fulness of his fame.

Ah, when was ever grief so deep
 As that we felt for him!
 The memory of it still we keep,
 And still our eyes are dim.

A gloom on all the nation fell;
 The cities held their breath,
 While muffled drum and funeral bell
 Pealed out the march of death.

By millions wept, his burial car
 Across the land was drawn,
 To lay him on his prairie far
 Beside the Sangamon.

And there, where once the honest youth
 His lonely life began,
 He sleeps, — the soul of right and truth,
 The pure, immortal man.

Wherever men are sore oppressed,
 Where hearts in bondage bend,
 All mourn for him, in East or West,
 For they have lost a friend.

And not his State or land alone
 Shall build his future fame:
 Through all the world the worth is known
 Of Abraham Lincoln's name!