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THE DEATH OF LINCOLN

THE DEATH
OF
PRESIDENT LINCOLN
A POEM

By EDOUARD GRENIER

(Obtained the prize at the "Concourse de Poésie"
at the French Academy)

Translated by MRS. C. L. BOTTA

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A Birthday Present
to WILLIAM F. GABLE

TO HIM THAT WAS CRUCIFIED

My spirit to yours, dear brother,
Do not mind because many, sounding your name, do not understand
you,
I do not sound your name, but I understand you, (there are others
also;)
I specify you with joy, O my comrade, to salute you, and to salute
those who are with you, before and since — and those to come
also,
That we all labor together, transmitting the same charge and
succession;
We few, equals, indifferent of lands, indifferent of times,
We, enclosers of all continents, all castes — allowers of all theol-
ogies,
Compassionaters, perceivers, rapport of men,
We walk silent among disputes and assertions, but reject not the
disputers, nor any thing that is asserted,
We hear the bawling and din — we are reached at by divisions,
jealousies, recriminations on every side,
They close peremptorily upon us, to surround us, my comrade,
Yet we walk unheld, free, the whole earth over, journeying up and
down, till we make our ineffaceable mark upon time and the
diverse eras,
Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races,
ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers, as we are.

WHITMAN, *Leaves of Grass*

THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN

One

To chant thy dirge in fitting, worthy words,
Our time is too perturbed, our souls too vain;
Where may we find, O Lincoln! accents strong
Wherewith to paint thy rugged, wondrous traits?
Can our own tongue, nursed at the feet of kings
On whom it pours unceasing flatteries,
Can it in verse plebeian and robust
Sing the death-song of a great citizen?
Let me essay—thy virtue be my theme;
Inspire me thou with accents worthy her,
In which, without or pomp or splendor vain,
Simplicity shall into grandeur rise.

Ere yet an age had passed the Atlantic saw
The new America born on her shores
Springing to life and growth, the arena vast,
Fruitful and free—free to all human-kind,
Where the old world her swarming millions sent,
And where in Nature's bosom man again
Returned to freedom, as the metal grows
Pure in the crucible. Now striding on
With rapid bounds did the young nation reach
The great Pacific, there to set a bound
To the Colossus of the frozen North,
Who casts his threatening shadow over us,
Whose icy feet tread on three continents.
Thus to despotic power God seemed to say,
"No farther go!" Eternal justice now
Holds its divine balance o'er the globe,
Making this free young land to rise and bloom,
And show the astonished world the spectacle
Of a great State self-governed, self-sustained.
But in the greatness lurked the germ of death,
A deep, devouring canker gnawed her breast;
Slavery most hideous all her laws deformed;
She whose foul chains outrage two souls at once,
Victor and victim bind in one dread bond,
Branding the master deeper than the slave.
The nation saw the curse that grew with time,
Tend onward to its fatal end, and knew
That she must cast it off or perish there;
Then, like a hero, with firm hand and sure
She plucked the iron from her dreadful wound,
And bravely washed away the stain in blood—
Alas! how freely and how pure it flowed!

When Lincoln to the helm of State was called,
America was drifting towards the rocks
Like a disabled, storm-tossed ship at sea;
The day of dreadful reckning had come,
The winds of discord whistled through the sails
And rent the flag of stars; doubt and dismay
Seized on the gallant ship about to plunge
Into the yawning gulf which opened wide.
He came, sad and alone—God his sole guide—
With firm, intrepid gaze saw the dire ill;
Without reproach or fear he seized the helm,
And through four years, four dark, tempestuous years,
Calm in defeat as calm in victory,
He saw at length the fearful storm subside.
The waves retire, lulled by his sovereign voice,
The sound of discord stifled dies away,
And the brave pilot sights the distant port.
To him the slave holds forth his unbound arms,
And peace and mercy wait on all his steps.
But the grand drama has a bloodier act,
Blind hatred now to the vast hecatomb
Of martyrs slain the last great victim adds—
Lincoln falls bleeding at the assassin's feet.

Die then, but die content, since ere they closed
Thine eyes beheld the day of Justice dawn,
And at thy bidding a whole race oppressed
Rise up and gain the dignity of man,
Of family, of citizens, of law.

A nation's crime to expiate thy life
Thy great soul offered as a sacrifice,
And God accepted it. Oh! happy thou,
The glory of thy country, thy great name
The legacy to our degenerate age,
Supplanting the false grandeur of the past;
A model rare with moral beauty crowned,
Gentleness, justice, and simplicity.
Hero and Christian, Child of Liberty,
Our age is proud of thee, great honest man!—
Honest and dear! The heroes of old Rome
Thou dost not pale before. Democracy
Shall to thy virtues point, and say with pride,
I too my Cincinnatuses can boast!

Upward and onward was thy course of life,
Whose every step was nearer to the goal;
The hewer of wood, the unlettered laborer,
Self-taught, set his firm foot on the first round.
Ardent and eager on he took his way,
Higher and higher, to a wider field;
Up from the forum to the height of State,
Made by the people's love Chief Magistrate.
But not enough—one higher step remains,
One glory still—the palm of martyrdom.
'Tis his; and now, O Lincoln, thou canst die,
Earth and its grandeur hath no more for thee.

Thus didst thou die; but why did mocking Fate
Reserve for thee a Caesar's destiny—
Scorner of freedom and of human-kind
Upon what sacred right hadst thou laid hand?
When didst thou seek thine own wrongs to avenge?
When did thy covetous lust of power lead thee,
In the State's name, to trample on the weak?
Thou didst not blight nor veil fair liberty,
Type of a nation's head, great citizen!
Good, simple, grand, thou only knewest it not.
Alas! when thou didst fall, at that dread stroke
Evil had done its work, the hour had come
Of triumph for thy heart's great clemency,
The crowning glory of all conquerors.
Oh, with what filial care, what tenderness,
Wouldst thou thy bleeding country have raised up,
And in her bosom, rent with nameless wounds,
Have poured oblivion, pardon, and peace,
How gentle was the soul in thy rude form,
What hidden sweetness lay in thy great strength;
How simple, childlike, guileless was thy heart,
Thou gentle statesman—lion nursed with milk!

For thee, thou mine, fired with the assassin's part,
Blind criminal, whom Ravailiac awaits
Among the parricides, didst thou not know
That step by step does vengeance follow crime?
That thought, immortal thought, no sword can harm,
No power can conquer not like it divine;
That who would slay it only aids its growth?
Did the blow struck by Brutus save the world
From the oppressor's chain? No Caesar's blood
The royal purple of Octavius dyed;
In Plato Socrates still lived and spoke;
Luther, Melancthon, Huss bequeathed his foes;
Joan of Arc, upon her funeral pyre
Transformed, became the angel of the land;
And Christ, in dying on the shameful cross,
Saved a lost world, that henceforth hailed him God!

Lincoln, sleep now in peace! Thy memory,
Girt with a double halo, will remain;
In good men's hearts thy name will ever live,
And toil's poor sons, soldiers to duty vowed,
The lowly, simple, meek ones of the earth,
Shall find in thee the hero of their dreams.
The worship of those ancient ravagers
Of states and cities, whose triumphant feet
Trampled to dust alike the child and sire,
Scourges of God, in history now shall pale
Before the growing splendor of thy fame.
O gentle hero, wise and great plebeian,
Sleep thou in peace! we bless thee! sleep thou well!
The great good man lives for all time, all men,
And when he dies his country not alone,
But all the world his memory inherits.
To thee man owes the slave's dissevered chain,
Thrones the example of a duty done;
Thy country owes to thee peace, strength restored;
Europe an ideal grand and undefined;
And future ages shall thy name inscribe
Higher than Caesar's—next to Washington.

