

Lincoln's Memory

29 August 2019

So favored forms of power
shall not perish from the earth,
would you please sing for us, O History,
about the urgent birth
of these great, terrible, united States,
which, though conceived in Liberty,
did break, some say, that vow?

This nation under God, twice founded,
ever failing, yet immortal,
did embark toward the dream of Freedom
led by that one stout Kentuckian
who hated much as loved
and took a promise unfulfilled
and made it law to bind on all.

This promise, called Equality,
our hope in days to come,
arose, O History! through violence,
and herein lies its song.

--

Tw'as eighteen-fifty-eight, whereon a Senate seat contended
led the folks of Illinois to dream they saw a President.
One Lincoln-not-yet-Deity, preparing for debate,
stood by a portrait of old Jefferson, to whom he could relate,
and said,

"Old predecessor tongue with wings, remind me,
whence came our brave truth,
that all men are created equal.
Knew you this in youth?"

To which the painting said,
"It was a growth of many years,
first born on England's hills
in faithful regicide."

And Lincoln asked,
"But had you heard of man's first disobedience
and the fruit?"

Came quick reply:
"Our Massachusetts friends knew of such things,
but I did hope to purge all superstition,
and robe God in Nature."

"Ah, in nature," Lincoln said.

"That's right. For all can become noble
if they're only left alone."

Great Lincoln, growing pond'rous,
stroked his chin
and paced before the painting,
murmuring, "If left alone..."

He did not dare to broach the question,
burned on his and other minds,
of Slavery, but rather urged this thought:
"Suppose we find all men not equal. Who's at fault?"

But there was no reply.

The painting would not speak,
and Lincoln found his affirmation.

As the sureness grew,
he pondered long
and nursed a budding song.

--

This Lincoln after many years
appeared before the dead
and spoke the words
we will not long remember,

for we must not hallow,
must not consecrate that ground
where many died and killed.

Thus Lincoln willed,
and thus we must obey.

--

But Oh, how Declaration
had sent shocks across the sea
as Mr. Jefferson endeavored
to give ground to that new plea
which was come forth just then,
at last!

And when 'twas time for tea in Boston,
there was Paine in every head,
and 'twas ideas, sir, ideas!
which would leave so many dead.

--

Lord, such war and terror
bled from North down through the South
until the only ones remaining
banished God and punished doubt.

To devastation wrought,
and to the horror not quite heeded,

To man's ultimate obedience,
friend History, give song.