

Roosevelt, Like Lincoln, Died On Eve of American Victory

Franklin D. Roosevelt's death lacked three days of falling on the anniversary of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. And, like Lincoln, he died on the eve of the final triumph of the nation's armies.

Lee had surrendered to Grant at Appomattox, Va., on April 9, 1865, but it was not until after Lincoln's death on April 15 that the remaining Confederate Army capitulated. Gen. William T. Sherman had just received the Confederate Gen. Joseph F. Johnston at Raleigh, N. C., to discuss terms when a telegram arrived informing him that the President had been slain. Sherman related that tears rolled down Johnston's cheeks at the news.

The poet, Walt Whitman, after brooding in solitude for several days following Lincoln's death, wrote his famous "O Captain, My Captain." Into its verses he put his deep sense of personal loss and his tribute to a man whom, as Carl Sandburg says, he regarded as the prophet of a "new time for the common man and woman."

Because it is equally appropriate now, the poem is reprinted.

O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

(Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1865)

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring,
But O heart! heart! heart!

O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths—for you the shores
a-crowding,

For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!

This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchored safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won:

Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread
Walk the deck my Captain
Fallen cold and dead.

Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

PHILADELPHIA RECORD

Friday, April 13, 1945

OldMagazineArticles