

OH, WHY SHOULD THE SPIRIT OF MORTAL BE PROUD?

This immortal poem was President Lincoln's favorite, and he was fond of repeating it. He never knew who its author was, but it was William Knox, a Scotch poet who died in 1825 and whom Walter Scott thought highly of. The poem is one of the sort which bears many a re-reading as the years go by.

OH, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?
Like a swift fleeting meteor, a fast flying cloud,
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
Man passes from life to his rest in the grave.

The leaves of the oak and the willow shall fade,
Be scattered around and together be laid;
And the young and the old, and the low and the high,
Shall molder to dust and together shall lie.

The infant a mother attended and loved,
The mother that infant's affection who proved,
The husband that mother and infant who blessed,
Each, all, are away to their dwellings of rest.

The maid on whose cheek, on whose brow, in whose eye,
Shone beauty and pleasure—her triumphs are by;
And the memory of those who loved her and praised,
Are alike from the minds of the living erased.

The hand of the king that the scepter hath borne,
The brow of the priest that the miter hath worn,
The eye of the sage, and the heart of the brave,
Are hidden and lost in the depths of the grave.

The peasant whose lot was to sow and to reap,
The herdsman who climbed with his goats up the steep,
The beggar who wandered in search of his bread,
Have faded away like the grass that we tread.