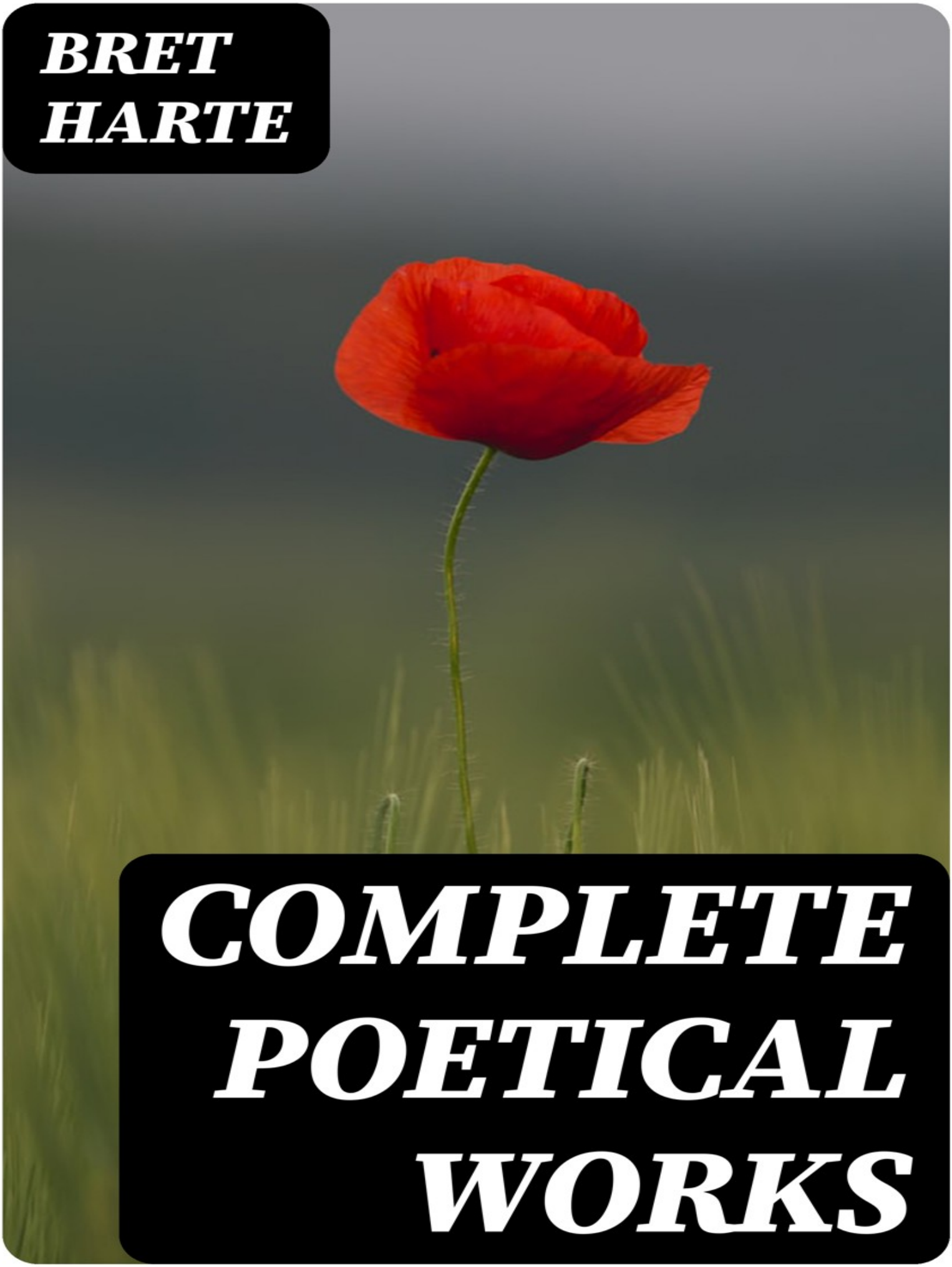
BRET HARTE



# COMPLETE POETICAL WORKS

**Bret Harte**

# Complete Poetical Works

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# BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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Although Bret Harte's name is identified with Californian life, it was not till he was fifteen that the author of "Plain Language from Truthful James" saw the country of his adoption. Francis Bret Harte, to give the full name which he carried till he became famous, was born at Albany, New York, August 25, 1839. He went with his widowed mother to California in 1854, and was thrown as a young man into the hurly-burly which he more than any other writer has made real to distant and later people. He was by turns a miner, school-teacher, express messenger, printer, and journalist. The types which live again in his pages are thus not only what he observed, but what he himself impersonated in his own experience.

He began trying his pen in The Golden Era of San Francisco, where he was working as a compositor; and when The Californian, edited by Charles Henry Webb, was started in 1864 as a literary newspaper, he was one of a group of brilliant young fellows—Mark Twain, Charles Warren Stoddard, Webb himself, and Prentice Mulford—who gave at

once a new interest in California beside what mining and agriculture caused. Here in an early number appeared "The Ballad of the Emeu," and he contributed many poems, grave and gay, as well as prose in a great variety of form. At the same time he was appointed Secretary of the United States Branch Mint at San Francisco, holding the office till 1870.

But Bret Harte's great opportunity came when The Overland Monthly was established in 1868 by Anton Roman. This magazine was the outgrowth of the racy, exuberant literary spirit which had already found free expression in the journals named. An eager ambition to lift all the new life of the Pacific into a recognized place in the world of letters made the young men we have named put their wits together in a monthly magazine which should rival the Atlantic in Boston and Blackwood in Edinburgh. The name was easily had, and for a sign manual on the cover some one drew a grizzly bear, that formidable exemplar of Californian wildness. But the design did not quite satisfy, until Bret Harte, with a felicitous stroke, drew two parallel lines just before the feet of the halting brute. Now it was the grizzly of the wilderness drawing back before the railway of civilization, and the picture was complete as an emblem.

Bret Harte became, by the common urgency of his companions, the first editor of the Overland, and at once his own tales and poems began, and in the second number appeared "The Luck of Roaring Camp," which instantly brought him wide fame. In a few months he found himself besought for poems and articles, sketches and stories, in influential magazines, and in 1871 he turned away from the

Pacific coast, and took up his residence, first in New York, afterward in Boston.

"No one," says his old friend, Mr. Stoddard, "who knows Mr. Harte, and knew the California of his day, wonders that he left it as he did. Eastern editors were crying for his work. Cities vied with one another in the offer of tempting bait. When he turned his back on San Francisco, and started for Boston, he began a tour that the greatest author of any age might have been proud of. It was a veritable ovation that swelled from sea to sea: the classic sheep was sacrificed all along the route. I have often thought that if Bret Harte had met with a fatal accident during that transcontinental journey, the world would have declared with one voice that the greatest genius of his time was lost to it."

In Boston he entered into an arrangement with the predecessors of the publishers of this volume, and his contributions appeared in their periodicals and were gathered into volumes. The arrangement in one form or another continued to the time of his death, and has for witness a stately array of comely volumes; but the prose has far outstripped the poetry. There are few writers of Mr. Harte's prodigality of nature who have used with so much fine reserve their faculty for melodious verse, and the present volume contains the entire body of his poetical work, growing by minute accretions during thirty odd years.

In 1878 he was appointed United States Consul at Crefeld, Germany, and after that date he resided, with little interruption, on the Continent or in England. He was transferred to Glasgow in March, 1880, and remained there until July, 1885. During the rest of his life he made his home

in London. His foreign residence is disclosed in a number of prose sketches and tales and in one or two poems; but life abroad never dimmed the vividness of the impressions made on him by the experience of his early manhood when he partook of the elixir vitae of California, and the stories which from year to year flowed from an apparently inexhaustible fountain glittered with the gold washed down from the mountain slopes of that country which through his imagination he had made so peculiarly his own.

Mr. Harte died suddenly at Camberley, England, May 6, 1902.

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# POEMS

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# I. NATIONAL

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# JOHN BURNS OF GETTYSBURG

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Have you heard the story that gossips tell
Of Burns of Gettysburg?—No? Ah, well:
Brief is the glory that hero earns,
Briefer the story of poor John Burns.
He was the fellow who won renown,—
The only man who didn't back down
When the rebels rode through his native town;
But held his own in the fight next day,
When all his townsfolk ran away.
That was in July sixty-three,
The very day that General Lee,
Flower of Southern chivalry,
Baffled and beaten, backward reeled
From a stubborn Meade and a barren field.

I might tell how but the day before
John Burns stood at his cottage door,
Looking down the village street,
Where, in the shade of his peaceful vine,
He heard the low of his gathered kine,
And felt their breath with incense sweet;
Or I might say, when the sunset burned
The old farm gable, he thought it turned
The milk that fell like a babbling flood
Into the milk-pail red as blood!
Or how he fancied the hum of bees
Were bullets buzzing among the trees.
But all such fanciful thoughts as these
Were strange to a practical man like Burns,
Who minded only his own concerns,
Troubled no more by fancies fine
Than one of his calm-eyed, long-tailed kine,—
Quite old-fashioned and matter-of-fact,

Slow to argue, but quick to act.
That was the reason, as some folk say,
He fought so well on that terrible day.

And it was terrible. On the right
Raged for hours the heady fight,
Thundered the battery's double bass,—
Difficult music for men to face
While on the left—where now the graves
Undulate like the living waves
That all that day unceasing swept
Up to the pits the rebels kept—
Round shot ploughed the upland glades,
Sown with bullets, reaped with blades;
Shattered fences here and there
Tossed their splinters in the air;
The very trees were stripped and bare;
The barns that once held yellow grain
Were heaped with harvests of the slain;
The cattle bellowed on the plain,
The turkeys screamed with might and main,
And brooding barn-fowl left their rest
With strange shells bursting in each nest.

Just where the tide of battle turns,
Erect and lonely stood old John Burns.
How do you think the man was dressed?
He wore an ancient long buff vest,
Yellow as saffron,—but his best;
And buttoned over his manly breast
Was a bright blue coat, with a rolling collar,
And large gilt buttons,—size of a dollar,—
With tails that the country-folk called "swaller."
He wore a broad-brimmed, bell-crowned hat,
White as the locks on which it sat.
Never had such a sight been seen

For forty years on the village green,
Since old John Burns was a country beau,
And went to the "quiltings" long ago.

Close at his elbows all that day,
Veterans of the Peninsula,
Sunburnt and bearded, charged away;
And striplings, downy of lip and chin,—
Clerks that the Home Guard mustered in,—
Glanced, as they passed, at the hat he wore,
Then at the rifle his right hand bore,
And hailed him, from out their youthful lore,
With scraps of a slangy repertoire:
"How are you, White Hat?" "Put her through!"
"Your head's level!" and "Bully for you!"
Called him "Daddy,"—begged he'd disclose
The name of the tailor who made his clothes,
And what was the value he set on those;
While Burns, unmindful of jeer and scoff,
Stood there picking the rebels off,—
With his long brown rifle and bell-crown hat,
And the swallow-tails they were laughing at.

'Twas but a moment, for that respect
Which clothes all courage their voices checked;
And something the wildest could understand
Spake in the old man's strong right hand,
And his corded throat, and the lurking frown
Of his eyebrows under his old bell-crown;
Until, as they gazed, there crept an awe
Through the ranks in whispers, and some men saw,
In the antique vestments and long white hair,
The Past of the Nation in battle there;
And some of the soldiers since declare
That the gleam of his old white hat afar,
Like the crested plume of the brave Navarre,

That day was their oriflamme of war.

So raged the battle. You know the rest:
How the rebels, beaten and backward pressed,
Broke at the final charge and ran.
At which John Burns—a practical man—
Shouldered his rifle, unbent his brows,
And then went back to his bees and cows.

That is the story of old John Burns;
This is the moral the reader learns:
In fighting the battle, the question's whether
You'll show a hat that's white, or a feather!

## "HOW ARE YOU, SANITARY?"

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Down the picket-guarded lane
Rolled the comfort-laden wain,
Cheered by shouts that shook the plain,
Soldier-like and merry:
Phrases such as camps may teach,
Sabre-cuts of Saxon speech,
Such as "Bully!" "Them's the peach!"
"Wade in, Sanitary!"

Right and left the caissons drew
As the car went lumbering through,
Quick succeeding in review
Squadrons military;
Sunburnt men with beards like frieze,

Smooth-faced boys, and cries like these,—
"U. S. San. Com." "That's the cheese!"
"Pass in, Sanitary!"

In such cheer it struggled on
Till the battle front was won:
Then the car, its journey done,
Lo! was stationary;
And where bullets whistling fly
Came the sadder, fainter cry,
"Help us, brothers, ere we die,—
Save us, Sanitary!"

Such the work. The phantom flies,
Wrapped in battle clouds that rise:
But the brave—whose dying eyes,
Veiled and visionary,
See the jasper gates swung wide,
See the parted throng outside—
Hears the voice to those who ride:
"Pass in, Sanitary!"

# BATTLE BUNNY

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(MALVERN HILL, 1864)
"After the men were ordered to lie down, a white rabbit, which had
been hopping hither and thither over the field swept by grape and
musketry, took refuge among the skirmishers, in the breast

of a
corporal."—Report of the Battle of Malvern Hill.
Bunny, lying in the grass,
Saw the shining column pass;
Saw the starry banner fly,
Saw the chargers fret and fume,
Saw the flapping hat and plume,—
Saw them with his moist and shy
Most unspeculative eye,
Thinking only, in the dew,
That it was a fine review.

Till a flash, not all of steel,
Where the rolling caissons wheel,
Brought a rumble and a roar
Rolling down that velvet floor,
And like blows of autumn flail
Sharply threshed the iron hail.

Bunny, thrilled by unknown fears,
Raised his soft and pointed ears,
Mumbled his prehensile lip,
Quivered his pulsating hip,
As the sharp vindictive yell
Rose above the screaming shell;
Thought the world and all its men,—
All the charging squadrons meant,—
All were rabbit-hunters then,
All to capture him intent.
Bunny was not much to blame:
Wiser folk have thought the same,—
Wiser folk who think they spy
Every ill begins with "I."

Wildly panting here and there,
Bunny sought the freer air,

Till he hopped below the hill,
And saw, lying close and still,
Men with muskets in their hands.
(Never Bunny understands
That hypocrisy of sleep,
In the vigils grim they keep,
As recumbent on that spot
They elude the level shot.)

One—a grave and quiet man,
Thinking of his wife and child
Far beyond the Rapidan,
Where the Androscoggin smiled—
Felt the little rabbit creep,
Nestling by his arm and side,
Wakened from strategic sleep,
To that soft appeal replied,
Drew him to his blackened breast,
And— But you have guessed the rest.

Softly o'er that chosen pair
Omnipresent Love and Care
Drew a mightier Hand and Arm,
Shielding them from every harm;
Right and left the bullets waved,
Saved the saviour for the saved.

———

Who believes that equal grace
God extends in every place,
Little difference he scans
Twixt a rabbit's God and man's.

# THE REVEILLE

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Hark! I hear the tramp of thousands,
And of armed men the hum;
Lo! a nation's hosts have gathered
Round the quick alarming drum,—
Saying, "Come,
Freemen, come!
Ere your heritage be wasted," said the quick alarming drum.

"Let me of my heart take counsel:
War is not of life the sum;
Who shall stay and reap the harvest
When the autumn days shall come?"
But the drum
Echoed, "Come!
Death shall reap the braver harvest," said the solemn-sounding drum.

"But when won the coming battle,
What of profit springs therefrom?
What if conquest, subjugation,
Even greater ills become?"
But the drum
Answered, "Come!
You must do the sum to prove it," said the Yankee answering drum.

"What if, 'mid the cannons' thunder,
Whistling shot and bursting bomb,
When my brothers fall around me,

Should my heart grow cold and numb?"
But the drum
Answered, "Come!
Better there in death united, than in life a recreant.—Come!"

Thus they answered,—hoping, fearing,
Some in faith, and doubting some,
Till a trumpet-voice proclaiming,
Said, "My chosen people, come!"
Then the drum,
Lo! was dumb,
For the great heart of the nation, throbbing, answered,
"Lord, we come!"

## OUR PRIVILEGE

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Not ours, where battle smoke upcurls,
And battle dews lie wet,
To meet the charge that treason hurls
By sword and bayonet.

Not ours to guide the fatal scythe
The fleshless Reaper wields;
The harvest moon looks calmly down
Upon our peaceful fields.

The long grass dimples on the hill,
The pines sing by the sea,
And Plenty, from her golden horn,
Is pouring far and free.

O brothers by the farther sea!
Think still our faith is warm;
The same bright flag above us waves
That swathed our baby form.

The same red blood that dyes your fields
Here throbs in patriot pride,—
The blood that flowed when Lander fell,
And Baker's crimson tide.

And thus apart our hearts keep time
With every pulse ye feel,
And Mercy's ringing gold shall chime
With Valor's clashing steel.

# RELIEVING GUARD

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THOMAS STARR KING. OBIIT MARCH 4, 1864

Came the relief. "What, sentry, ho!
How passed the night through thy long waking?"
"Cold, cheerless, dark,—as may befit
The hour before the dawn is breaking."

"No sight? no sound?" "No; nothing save
The plover from the marshes calling,
And in yon western sky, about
An hour ago, a star was falling."

"A star? There's nothing strange in that."
"No, nothing; but, above the thicket,
Somehow it seemed to me that God
Somewhere had just relieved a picket."

# THE GODDESS

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CONTRIBUTED TO THE FAIR FOR THE LADIES' PATRIOTIC FUND OF THE PACIFIC

"Who comes?" The sentry's warning cry
Rings sharply on the evening air:
Who comes? The challenge: no reply,
Yet something motions there.

A woman, by those graceful folds;
A soldier, by that martial tread:
"Advance three paces. Halt! until
Thy name and rank be said."

"My name? Her name, in ancient song,
Who fearless from Olympus came:
Look on me! Mortals know me best
In battle and in flame."

"Enough! I know that clarion voice;
I know that gleaming eye and helm,
Those crimson lips,—and in their dew
The best blood of the realm.

"The young, the brave, the good and wise,
Have fallen in thy curst embrace:
The juices of the grapes of wrath
Still stain thy guilty face.

"My brother lies in yonder field,
Face downward to the quiet grass:
Go back! he cannot see thee now;
But here thou shalt not pass."

A crack upon the evening air,
A wakened echo from the hill:
The watchdog on the distant shore
Gives mouth, and all is still.

The sentry with his brother lies

Face downward on the quiet grass;
And by him, in the pale moonshine,
A shadow seems to pass.

No lance or warlike shield it bears:
A helmet in its pitying hands
Brings water from the nearest brook,
To meet his last demands.

Can this be she of haughty mien,
The goddess of the sword and shield?
Ah, yes! The Grecian poet's myth
Sways still each battlefield.

For not alone that rugged War
Some grace or charm from Beauty gains;
But, when the goddess' work is done,
The woman's still remains.

## ON A PEN OF THOMAS STARR KING

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This is the reed the dead musician dropped,
With tuneful magic in its sheath still hidden;
The prompt allegro of its music stopped,
Its melodies unbidden.

But who shall finish the unfinished strain,
Or wake the instrument to awe and wonder,
And bid the slender barrel breathe again,
An organ-pipe of thunder!

His pen! what humbler memories cling about
Its golden curves! what shapes and laughing graces
Slipped from its point, when his full heart went out
In smiles and courtly phrases?

The truth, half jesting, half in earnest flung;
The word of cheer, with recognition in it;
The note of alms, whose golden speech outrung
The golden gift within it.

But all in vain the enchanter's wand we wave:
No stroke of ours recalls his magic vision:
The incantation that its power gave
Sleeps with the dead magician.

# A SECOND REVIEW OF THE GRAND ARMY

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I read last night of the grand review
In Washington's chiefest avenue,—
Two hundred thousand men in blue,
I think they said was the number,—
Till I seemed to hear their trampling feet,
The bugle blast and the drum's quick beat,
The clatter of hoofs in the stony street,
The cheers of people who came to greet,
And the thousand details that to repeat
Would only my verse encumber,—
Till I fell in a reverie, sad and sweet,

And then to a fitful slumber.

When, lo! in a vision I seemed to stand
In the lonely Capitol. On each hand
Far stretched the portico, dim and grand
Its columns ranged like a martial band
Of sheeted spectres, whom some command
Had called to a last reviewing.
And the streets of the city were white and bare,
No footfall echoed across the square;
But out of the misty midnight air
I heard in the distance a trumpet blare,
And the wandering night-winds seemed to bear
The sound of a far tattooing.

Then I held my breath with fear and dread
For into the square, with a brazen tread,
There rode a figure whose stately head
O'erlooked the review that morning,
That never bowed from its firm-set seat
When the living column passed its feet,
Yet now rode steadily up the street
To the phantom bugle's warning:

Till it reached the Capitol square, and wheeled,
And there in the moonlight stood revealed
A well-known form that in State and field
Had led our patriot sires:
Whose face was turned to the sleeping camp,
Afar through the river's fog and damp,
That showed no flicker, nor waning lamp,
Nor wasted bivouac fires.

And I saw a phantom army come,
With never a sound of fife or drum,
But keeping time to a throbbing hum

Of wailing and lamentation:
The martyred heroes of Malvern Hill,
Of Gettysburg and Chancellorsville,
The men whose wasted figures fill
The patriot graves of the nation.

And there came the nameless dead,—the men
Who perished in fever swamp and fen,
The slowly-starved of the prison pen;
And, marching beside the others,
Came the dusky martyrs of Pillow's fight,
With limbs enfranchised and bearing bright;
I thought—perhaps 'twas the pale moonlight—
They looked as white as their brothers!

And so all night marched the nation's dead,
With never a banner above them spread,
Nor a badge, nor a motto brandished;
No mark—save the bare uncovered head
Of the silent bronze Reviewer;
With never an arch save the vaulted sky;
With never a flower save those that lie
On the distant graves—for love could buy
No gift that was purer or truer.

So all night long swept the strange array,
So all night long till the morning gray
I watched for one who had passed away;
With a reverent awe and wonder,—
Till a blue cap waved in the length'ning line,
And I knew that one who was kin of mine
Had come; and I spake—and lo! that sign
Awakened me from my slumber.

# THE COPPERHEAD

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(1864)

There is peace in the swamp where the Copperhead sleeps,
Where the waters are stagnant, the white vapor creeps,
Where the musk of Magnolia hangs thick in the air,
And the lilies' phylacteries broaden in prayer.
There is peace in the swamp, though the quiet is death,
Though the mist is miasma, the upas-tree's breath,
Though no echo awakes to the cooing of doves,—
There is peace: yes, the peace that the Copperhead loves.

Go seek him: he coils in the ooze and the drip,
Like a thong idly flung from the slave-driver's whip;
But beware the false footstep,—the stumble that brings
A deadlier lash than the overseer swings.
Never arrow so true, never bullet so dread,
As the straight steady stroke of that hammer-shaped head;
Whether slave or proud planter, who braves that dull crest,
Woe to him who shall trouble the Copperhead's rest!

Then why waste your labors, brave hearts and strong men,
In tracking a trail to the Copperhead's den?
Lay your axe to the cypress, hew open the shade
To the free sky and sunshine Jehovah has made;
Let the breeze of the North sweep the vapors away,
Till the stagnant lake ripples, the freed waters play;
And then to your heel can you righteously doom
The Copperhead born of its shadow and gloom!

# A SANITARY MESSAGE

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Last night, above the whistling wind,
I heard the welcome rain,—
A fusillade upon the roof,
A tattoo on the pane:
The keyhole piped; the chimney-top
A warlike trumpet blew;
Yet, mingling with these sounds of strife,
A softer voice stole through.

"Give thanks, O brothers!" said the voice,
"That He who sent the rains
Hath spared your fields the scarlet dew
That drips from patriot veins:
I've seen the grass on Eastern graves
In brighter verdure rise;
But, oh! the rain that gave it life
Sprang first from human eyes.

"I come to wash away no stain
Upon your wasted lea;
I raise no banners, save the ones
The forest waves to me:
Upon the mountain side, where Spring
Her farthest picket sets,
My reveille awakes a host
Of grassy bayonets.

"I visit every humble roof;
I mingle with the low:
Only upon the highest peaks
My blessings fall in snow;
Until, in tricklings of the stream
And drainings of the lea,
My unspent bounty comes at last
To mingle with the sea."

And thus all night, above the wind,
I heard the welcome rain,—
A fusillade upon the roof,
A tattoo on the pane:
The keyhole piped; the chimney-top
A warlike trumpet blew;
But, mingling with these sounds of strife,
This hymn of peace stole through.

# THE OLD MAJOR EXPLAINS

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(RE-UNION, ARMY OF THE POTOMAC, 12TH MAY, 1871)

Well, you see, the fact is, Colonel, I don't know as I can come:
For the farm is not half planted, and there's work to do at home;
And my leg is getting troublesome,—it laid me up last fall,—
And the doctors, they have cut and hacked, and never found the ball.