



Thomas Dunn English, "Battle of Monmouth," 1885. (High School version)

Four-and-eighty years are o'er me; great-grandchildren sit before me;
These my locks are white and scanty, and my limbs are weak and worn;
Yet I've been where cannon roaring, firelocks rattling, blood outpouring,
Stirred the souls of patriot soldiers, on the tide of battle borne;
Where they told me I was bolder far than many a comrade older,
Though a stripling at that fight for the right.

All that sultry day in summer beat his sullen march the drummer,
Where the Briton strode the dusty road until the sun went down;
Then on Monmouth plain encamping, tired and footsore with the tramping,
Lay all wearily and drearily the forces of the crown,
With their resting horses neighing, and their evening bugles playing,
And their sentries pacing slow to and fro.

Ere the day to night had shifted, camp was broken, knapsacks lifted,
And in motion was the vanguard of our swift-retreating foes;
Grim Knyphausen rode before his brutal Hessians, bloody Tories—
They were fit companions, truly, hirelings these and traitors those—
While the careless jest and laughter of the teamsters coming after
Rang around each creaking wain of the train.

'Twas a quiet Sabbath morning; nature gave no sign of warning
Of the struggle that would follow when we met the Briton's might;
Of the horsemen fiercely spurring, of the bullets shrilly whirring,
Of the bayonets brightly gleaming through the smoke that wrapped the fight;
Of the cannon thunder-pealing, and the wounded wretches reeling,
And the corpses gory red of the dead.

Quiet nature had no prescience; but the Tories and the Hessians
Heard the baying of the beagles that were hanging on their track;
Heard the cries of eager ravens soaring high above the cravens;
And they hurried, worn and worried, casting startled glances back,
Leaving Clinton there to meet us, with his bull-dogs fierce to greet us,
With the veterans of the crown, scarred and brown.

For the fight our souls were eager, and each Continental leaguer,
As he gripped his firelock firmly, scarce could wait the word to fire;
For his country rose such fervor, in his heart of hearts, to serve her,
That it gladdened him and maddened him and kindled raging ire.
Never panther from his fastness, through the forest's gloomy vastness,
Coursed more grimly night and day for his prey.

I was in the main force posted; Lee, of whom his minions boasted,
Was commander of the vanguard, and with him were Scott and Wayne.
What they did I knew not, cared not; in their march of shame I shared not;
But it startled me to see them panic-stricken back again,
At the black morass's border, all in headlong, fierce disorder,
With the Briton plying steel at their heel.

Outward cool when combat waging, howsoever inward raging,
Ne'er had Washington showed feeling when his forces fled the foe;
But to-day his forehead lowered, and we shrank his wrath untoward,
As on Lee his bitter speech was hurled in hissing tones and low:
"Sir, what means this wild confusion? Is it cowardice or collusion?
Is it treachery or fear brings you here?"

Lee grew crimson in his anger—rang his curses o'er the clangor,
O'er the roaring din of battle, as he wrathfully replied;
But his raging was unheeded; fastly on our chieftain speeded,
Rallied quick the fleeing forces, stayed the dark, retreating tide;
Then, on foaming steed returning, said to Lee, with wrath still burning,
"Will you now strike a blow at the foe?"

At the words Lee drew up proudly, curled his lip and answered loudly:
"Ay!" his voice rang out, "and will not be the first to leave the field;"
And his word redeeming fairly, with a skill surpassed but rarely,
Struck the Briton with such ardor that the scarlet column reeled;
Then, again, but in good order, past the black morass's border,
Brought his forces rent and torn, spent and worn.

As we turned on flanks and centre, in the path of death to enter,
One of Knox's brass six-pounders lost its Irish cannoneer;
And his wife who, 'mid the slaughter, had been bearing pails of water
For the gun and for the gunner, o'er his body shed no tear.
"Move the piece!"—but there they found her loading, firing that six-pounder,
And she gayly, till we won, worked the gun.

Loud we cheered as Captain Molly waved the rammer; then a volley
Pouring in upon the grenadiers, we sternly drove them back;
Though like tigers fierce they fought us, to such zeal had Molly brought us
That, though struck with heat, and thirsting, yet of drink we felt no lack:

There she stood amid the clamor, busily handling sponge and rammer,
While we swept with wrath condign on their line.

From our centre backward driven, with his forces rent and riven,
Soon the foe re-formed in order, dressed again his shattered ranks;
In a column firm advancing, from his bayonets hot rays glancing
Showed in waving lines of brilliance as he fell upon our flanks,
Charging bravely for his master: thus he met renewed disaster
From the stronghold that we held back repelled.

Monckton, gallant, cool, and fearless, 'mid his bravest comrades peerless,
Brought his grenadiers to action but to fall amid the slain;
Everywhere their ruin found them; red destruction rained around them
From the mouth of Oswald's cannon, from the musketry of Wayne;
While our sturdy Continentals, in their dusty regimentals,
Drove their plumed and scarlet force, man and horse.

Beamed the sunlight fierce and torrid o'er the battle raging horrid,
Till, in faint exhaustion sinking, death was looked on as a boon;
Heat, and not a drop of water—heat, that won the race of slaughter,
Fewer far with bullets dying than beneath the sun of June;
Only ceased the terrible firing, with the Briton slow retiring,
As the sunbeams in the west sank to rest.

On our arms so heavily sleeping, careless watch our sentries keeping,
Ready to renew the contest when the dawning day should show;
Worn with toil and heat, in slumber soon were wrapt our greatest number,
Seeking strength to rise again and fall upon the wearied foe;
For we felt his power was broken: but what rage was ours outspoken
When, on waking at the dawn, he had gone.

In the midnight still and sombre, while our force was wrapt in slumber,
Clinton set his train in motion, sweeping fast to Sandy Hook;
Safely from our blows he bore his mingled Britons, Hessians, Tories—
Bore away his wounded soldiers, but his useless dead forsook;
Fleeing from a worse undoing, and too far for our pursuing:
So we found the field our own, and alone.

How that stirring day comes o'er me! How those scenes arise before me!
How I feel a youthful vigor for a moment fill my frame!
Those who fought beside me seeing, from the dim past brought to being,
By their hands I fain would clasp them—ah! each lives but in his name;
But the freedom that they fought for, and the country grand they wrought for,
Is their monument to-day, and for aye.

Source: Thomas Dunn English, *The Boy's Book of Battle-Lyrics: A Collection of Verses Illustrating Some Notable Events in the History of the United States of America, from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Sectional War* (New York, 1885).