

SONG OF THE BANNER AT DAYBREAK.

Poet.

O a new song, a free song,
Flapping, flapping, flapping, flapping, by sounds, by voices clearer,
By the wind's voice and that of the drum,
By the banner's voice and child's voice and sea's voice and father's
 voice,
Low on the ground and high in the air,
On the ground where father and child stand,
In the upward air where their eyes turn,
Where the banner at daybreak is flapping.

Words! bookwords! what are you?
Words no more, for hearken and see,
My song is there in the open air, and I must sing,
With the banner and pennant a-flapping.

I'll weave the chord and twine in,
Man's desire and babe's desire, I'll twine them in, I'll put in life,
I'll put the bayonet's flashing point, I'll let bullets and slugs
 whizz,
(As one carrying a symbol and menace far into the future,
Crying with trumpet voice, Arouse and beware! Beware and arouse!)
I'll pour the verse with streams of blood, full of volition, full of

joy.

Then loosen, launch forth, to go and compete,
With the banner and pennant a-flapping.

Pennant.

Come up here, bard, bard,
Come up here, soul, soul,
Come up here, dear little child,
To fly in the clouds and winds with me, and play with the measureless
light.

Child.

Father what is that in the sky beckoning to me with long finger?
And what does it say to me all the while?

Father.

Nothing my babe you see in the sky,
And nothing at all to you it says--but look you my babe,
Look at these dazzling things in the houses, and see you the
money-shops opening,
And see you the vehicles preparing to crawl along the streets with
goods;
These, ah these, how valued and toil'd for these!
How envied by all the earth.

Poet.

Fresh and rosy red the sun is mounting high,
On floats the sea in distant blue careering through its channels,
On floats the wind over the breast of the sea setting in toward land,
The great steady wind from west or west-by-south,
Floating so buoyant with milk-white foam on the waters.

But I am not the sea nor the red sun,
I am not the wind with girlish laughter,
Not the immense wind which strengthens, not the wind which lashes,
Not the spirit that ever lashes its own body to terror and death,
But I am that which unseen comes and sings, sings, sings,
Which babbles in brooks and scoots in showers on the land,
Which the birds know in the woods mornings and evenings,
And the shore-sands know and the hissing wave, and that banner and
 pennant,
Aloft there flapping and flapping.

Child.

O father it is alive--it is full of people--it has children,
O now it seems to me it is talking to its children,
I hear it--it talks to me--O it is wonderful!
O it stretches--it spreads and runs so fast--O my father,
It is so broad it covers the whole sky.

Father.

Cease, cease, my foolish babe,

What you are saying is sorrowful to me, much it displeases me;
Behold with the rest again I say, behold not banners and pennants
aloft,
But the well-prepared pavements behold, and mark the solid-wall'd
houses.

Banner and Pennant.

Speak to the child O bard out of Manhattan,
To our children all, or north or south of Manhattan,
Point this day, leaving all the rest, to us over all--and yet we know
not why,
For what are we, mere strips of cloth profiting nothing,
Only flapping in the wind?

Poet.

I hear and see not strips of cloth alone,
I hear the tramp of armies, I hear the challenging sentry,
I hear the jubilant shouts of millions of men, I hear Liberty!
I hear the drums beat and the trumpets blowing,
I myself move abroad swift-rising flying then,
I use the wings of the land-bird and use the wings of the sea-bird,
and look down as from a height,
I do not deny the precious results of peace, I see populous cities
with wealth incalculable,
I see numberless farms, I see the farmers working in their fields or
barns,

I see mechanics working, I see buildings everywhere founded, going
up, or finished,
I see trains of cars swiftly speeding along railroad tracks drawn by
the locomotives,
I see the stores, depots, of Boston, Baltimore, Charleston, New
Orleans,
I see far in the West the immense area of grain, I dwell awhile
hovering,
I pass to the lumber forests of the North, and again to the Southern
plantation, and again to California;
Sweeping the whole I see the countless profit, the busy gatherings,
earn'd wages,
See the Identity formed out of thirty-eight spacious and haughty
States, (and many more to come,)
See forts on the shores of harbors, see ships sailing in and out;
Then over all, (aye! aye!) my little and lengthen'd pennant shaped
like a sword,
Runs swiftly up indicating war and defiance--and now the halyards
have rais'd it,
Side of my banner broad and blue, side of my starry banner,
Discarding peace over all the sea and land.

Banner and Pennant.

Yet louder, higher, stronger, bard! yet farther, wider cleave!

No longer let our children deem us riches and peace alone,

We may be terror and carnage, and are so now,

Not now are we any one of these spacious and haughty States, (nor any
five, nor ten,)

Nor market nor depot we, nor money-bank in the city,

But these and all, and the brown and spreading land, and the mines
below, are ours,

And the shores of the sea are ours, and the rivers great and small,

And the fields they moisten, and the crops and the fruits are ours,

Bays and channels and ships sailing in and out are ours--while we
over all,

Over the area spread below, the three or four millions of square
miles, the capitals,

The forty millions of people,--O bard! in life and death supreme,

We, even we, henceforth flaunt out masterful, high up above,

Not for the present alone, for a thousand years chanting through you,

This song to the soul of one poor little child.

Child.

O my father I like not the houses,

They will never to me be any thing, nor do I like money,

But to mount up there I would like, O father dear, that banner I

like,

That pennant I would be and must be.

Father.

Child of mine you fill me with anguish,

To be that pennant would be too fearful,

Little you know what it is this day, and after this day, forever,
It is to gain nothing, but risk and defy every thing,
Forward to stand in front of wars--and O, such wars!--what have you
to do with them?

With passions of demons, slaughter, premature death?

Banner.

Demons and death then I sing,

Put in all, aye all will I, sword-shaped pennant for war,

And a pleasure new and ecstatic, and the prattled yearning of
children,

Blent with the sounds of the peaceful land and the liquid wash of the
sea,

And the black ships fighting on the sea envelop'd in smoke,

And the icy cool of the far, far north, with rustling cedars and
pines,

And the whirr of drums and the sound of soldiers marching, and the
hot sun shining south,

And the beach-waves combing over the beach on my Eastern shore, and
my Western shore the same,

And all between those shores, and my ever running Mississippi with
bends and chutes,

And my Illinois fields, and my Kansas fields, and my fields of
Missouri,

The Continent, devoting the whole identity without reserving an atom,

Pour in! whelm that which asks, which sings, with all and the yield

of all,
Fusing and holding, claiming, devouring the whole,
No more with tender lip, nor musical labial sound,
But out of the night emerging for good, our voice persuasive no more,
Croaking like crows here in the wind.

Poet.

My limbs, my veins dilate, my theme is clear at last,
Banner so broad advancing out of the night, I sing you haughty and
resolute,
I burst through where I waited long, too long, deafen'd and blinded,
My hearing and tongue are come to me, (a little child taught me,)
I hear from above O pennant of war your ironical call and demand,
Insensate! insensate! (yet I at any rate chant you,) O banner!
Not houses of peace indeed are you, nor any nor all their prosperity,
(if need be, you shall again have every one of those houses
to destroy them,
You thought not to destroy those valuable houses, standing fast, full
of comfort, built with money,
May they stand fast, then? not an hour except you above them and all
stand fast;)
O banner, not money so precious are you, not farm produce you, nor
the material good nutriment,
Nor excellent stores, nor landed on wharves from the ships,
Not the superb ships with sail-power or steam-power, fetching and
carrying cargoes,

Nor machinery, vehicles, trade, nor revenues--but you as henceforth I
see you,
Running up out of the night, bringing your cluster of stars,
(ever-enlarging stars,)
Divider of daybreak you, cutting the air, touch'd by the sun,
measuring the sky,
(Passionately seen and yearn'd for by one poor little child,
While others remain busy or smartly talking, forever teaching thrift,
thrift;)
O you up there! O pennant! where you undulate like a snake hissing so
curious,
Out of reach, an idea only, yet furiously fought for, risking bloody
death, loved by me,
So loved--O you banner leading the day with stars brought from the
night!
Valueless, object of eyes, over all and demanding all--(absolute
owner of all)--O banner and pennant!
I too leave the rest--great as it is, it is nothing--houses, machines
are nothing--I see them not,
I see but you, O warlike pennant! O banner so broad, with stripes, I
sing you only,
Flapping up there in the wind.