

THE CENTENARIAN'S STORY.

Volunteer of 1861-2, (at Washington Park, Brooklyn, assisting the
Centenarian.)

Give me your hand old Revolutionary,
The hill-top is nigh, but a few steps, (make room gentlemen,)
Up the path you have follow'd me well, spite of your hundred and
extra years,
You can walk old man, though your eyes are almost done,
Your faculties serve you, and presently I must have them serve me.
Rest, while I tell what the crowd around us means,
On the plain below recruits are drilling and exercising,
There is the camp, one regiment departs to-morrow,
Do you hear the officers giving their orders?
Do you hear the clank of the muskets?

Why what comes over you now old man?
Why do you tremble and clutch my hand so convulsively?
The troops are but drilling, they are yet surrounded with smiles.
Around them at hand the well-drest friends and the women,
While splendid and warm the afternoon sun shines down,
Green the midsummer verdure and fresh blows the dallying breeze,
O'er proud and peaceful cities and arm of the sea between.

But drill and parade are over, they march back to quarters,
Only hear that approval of hands! hear what a clapping!

As wending the crowds now part and disperse--but we old man,
Not for nothing have I brought you hither--we must remain,
You to speak in your turn, and I to listen and tell.

The Centenarian.

When I clutch'd your hand it was not with terror,
But suddenly pouring about me here on every side,
And below there where the boys were drilling, and up the slopes they
 ran,
And where tents are pitch'd, and wherever you see south and
 south-east and south-west,
Over hills, across lowlands, and in the skirts of woods,
And along the shores, in mire (now fill'd over) came again and
 suddenly raged,
As eighty-five years a-gone no mere parade receiv'd with applause of
 friends,
But a battle which I took part in myself--aye, long ago as it is I
 took part in it,
Walking then this hill-top, this same ground.

Aye, this is the ground,
My blind eyes even as I speak behold it re-peopled from graves,

The years recede, pavements and stately houses disappear,
Rude forts appear again, the old hoop'd guns are mounted,
I see the lines of rais'd earth stretching from river to bay,
I mark the vista of waters, I mark the uplands and slopes;
Here we lay encamp'd, it was this time in summer also.

As I talk I remember all, I remember the Declaration,
It was read here, the whole army paraded, it was read to us here,
By his staff surrounded the General stood in the middle, he held up
his unsheath'd sword,
It glitter'd in the sun in full sight of the army.

'Twas a bold act then--the English war-ships had just arrived,
We could watch down the lower bay where they lay at anchor,
And the transports swarming with soldiers.

A few days more and they landed, and then the battle.

Twenty thousand were brought against us,
A veteran force furnish'd with good artillery.
I tell not now the whole of the battle,
But one brigade early in the forenoon order'd forward to engage the
red-coats,
Of that brigade I tell, and how steadily it march'd,
And how long and well it stood confronting death.

Who do you think that was marching steadily sternly confronting
death?

It was the brigade of the youngest men, two thousand strong,
Raised in Virginia and Maryland, and most of them known personally to
the General.

Jauntily forward they went with quick step toward Gowanus' waters,
Till of a sudden unlook'd for by defiles through the woods, gain'd at
night,

The British advancing, rounding in from the east, fiercely playing
their guns,

That brigade of the youngest was cut off and at the enemy's mercy.

The General watch'd them from this hill,

They made repeated desperate attempts to burst their environment,

They drew close together, very compact, their flag flying in the
middle,

But O from the hills how the cannon were thinning and thinning them!

It sickens me yet, that slaughter!

I saw the moisture gather in drops on the face of the General.

I saw how he wrung his hands in anguish.

Meanwhile the British manoeuvr'd to draw us out for a pitch'd battle,

But we dared not trust the chances of a pitch'd battle.

We fought the fight in detachments.
Sallying forth we fought at several points, but in each the luck was
 against us,
Our foe advancing, steadily getting the best of it, push'd us back to
 the works on this hill,
Till we turn'd menacing here, and then he left us.

That was the going out of the brigade of the youngest men, two
 thousand strong,
Few return'd, nearly all remain in Brooklyn.
That and here my General's first battle,
No women looking on nor sunshine to bask in, it did not conclude with
 applause,
Nobody clapp'd hands here then.

But in darkness in mist on the ground under a chill rain,
Wearied that night we lay foil'd and sullen,
While scornfully laugh'd many an arrogant lord oft' against us
 encamp'd,
Quite within hearing, feasting, clinking wineglasses together over
 their victory.

So dull and damp and another day,
But the night of that, mist lifting, rain ceasing,
Silent as a ghost while they thought they were sure of him, my
 General retreated.

I saw him at the river-side,
Down by the ferry lit by torches, hastening the embarkation;
My General waited till the soldiers and wounded were all pass'd over,
And then, (it was just ere sunrise,) these eyes rested on him for the
last time.

Every one else seem'd fill'd with gloom,
Many no doubt thought of capitulation.

But when my General pass'd me,
As he stood in his boat and look'd toward the coming sun,
I saw something different from capitulation.

Terminus.

Enough, the Centenarian's story ends,
The two, the past and present, have interchanged,
I myself as connecter, as chansonnier of a great future, am now
speaking.

And is this the ground Washington trod?
And these waters I listlessly daily cross, are these the waters he
cross'd,
As resolute in defeat as other generals in their proudest triumphs?

I must copy the story, and send it eastward and westward,
I must preserve that look as it beam'd on you rivers of Brooklyn.

See--as the annual round returns the phantoms return,
It is the 27th of August and the British have landed,
The battle begins and goes against us, behold through the smoke
 Washington's face,
The brigade of Virginia and Maryland have march'd forth to intercept
 the enemy,
They are cut off, murderous artillery from the hills plays upon them,
Rank after rank falls, while over them silently droops the flag,
Baptized that day in many a young man's bloody wounds,
In death, defeat, and sisters', mothers' tears.

Ah, hills and slopes of Brooklyn! I perceive you are more valuable
 than your owners supposed;
In the midst of you stands an encampment very old,
Stands forever the camp of that dead brigade.