**“**[**THE SLEEPING SENTINEL**](http://www.civilwarpoetry.org/union/soldierlife/sentinel-exp.html)**” By Francis De Haes Janvier**

'Twas in the sultry summer-time, as war's red records show,

When patriot armies rose to meet a fratricidal foe;

When from the North, and East, and West, like the upheaving sea,

Swept forth Columbia's sons, to make our country truly free.

Within a prison's dismal walls, where shadows veiled decay,

In fetters, on a heap of straw, a youthful soldier lay;

Heart-broken, hopeless, and forlorn, with short and feverish breath,

He waited but the appointed hour to die a culprit's death.

Yet, but a few brief weeks before, untroubled with a care,

He roamed at will, and freely drew his native mountain air;

Where sparkling streams leap mossy rocks, from many a woodland font,

And waving elms and grassy slopes give beauty to Vermont;

Where, dwelling in a humble cot, a tiller of the soil,

Encircled by a mother's love, he shared a father's toil.

Till, borne upon the wailing winds, his suffering country's cry

Fired his young heart with fervent zeal, for her to live or die.

Then left he all; a few fond tears, by firmness half concealed,

A blessing, and a parting prayer, and he was in the field.

The field of strife, whose dews are blood, whose breezes war's hot breath,

Whose fruits are garnered in the grave, whose husbandman is death!

Without a murmur he endured a service new and hard;

But, wearied with a toilsome march, it chanced one night, on guard,

He sank, exhausted, at his post, and the gray morning found

His prostrate form, a sentinel asleep upon the ground!

But God is love - and finite minds can faintly comprehend

How gentle Mercy, in His rule, may with stern Justice blend;

And this poor soldier, seized and bound, found none to justify,

While war's inexorable law decreed that he must die.

'Twas night. In a secluded room, with measured tread and slow,

A statesman of commanding mien paced gravely to and fro.

Oppressed, he pondered on a land by civil discord rent;

On brothers armed in deadly strife: it was the President!

The woes of thirty millions filled his burdened heart with grief;

Embattled hosts, on land and sea, acknowledged him their chief;

And yet, amid the din of war, he heard the plaintive cry

Of that poor soldier, as he lay in prison, doomed to die!

'Twas morning. On a tented field, and through the heated haze,

Flashed back, from lines of burnished arms, the sun's effulgent blaze;

While, from a somber prison house, seen slowly to emerge,

A sad procession, o'er the sward, moved to a muffled dirge.

And in the midst, with faltering step, and pale and anxious face,

In manacles, between two guards, a soldier had his place.

A youth, led out to die; and yet it was not death, but shame,

That smote his gallant heart with dread, and shook his manly frame!

Still on, before the marshalled ranks, the train pursued its way,

Up to the designated spot, whereon a coffin lay-

His coffin! And, with reeling brain, despairing, desolate-

He took his station by its side, abandoned to his fate!

Then came across his wavering sight strange pictures in the air:

He saw his distant mountain home; he saw his parents there;

He saw them bowed with hopeless grief, through fast declining years;

He saw a nameless grave; and then, the vision closed-in tears!

Yet once again. In double file, advancing, then, he saw

Twelve comrades, sternly set apart to execute the law-

But saw no more; his senses swam-deep darkness settled round-

And, shuddering, he awaited now the fatal volley's sound!

Then suddenly was heard the sounds of steeds and wheels approach,

And, rolling through a cloud of dust, appeared a stately coach.

On, past the guards, and through the field, its rapid course was bent,

Till, halting, 'mid the lines was seen the nation's President!

He came to save that stricken soul, now waking from despair;

And from a thousand voices rose a shout which rent the air!

The pardoned soldier understood the tones of jubilee,

And, bounding from his fetters, blessed the hand that made him free!

'Twas spring. Within a verdant vale, where Warwick's crystal tide

Reflected, o'er its peaceful breast, fair fields on either side;

Where birds and flowers combined to cheer a sylvan solitude,

Two threatening armies, face to face, in fierce defiance stood!

Two threatening armies! One invoked by injured Liberty-

Which bore above its patriot ranks the symbol of the Free;

And one, a rebel horde, beneath a flaunting flag of bars,

A fragment, torn by traitorous hands from Freedom's Stripes and Stars!

A sudden burst of smoke and flame, from many a thundering gun,

Proclaimed, along the echoing hills, the conflict had begun;

While shot and shell athwart the stream with fiendish fury sped,

To strew among the living lines the dying and the dead!

Then, louder than the roaring storm, pealed forth the stern command,

"Charge, soldiers, charge!" and, at the word, with shouts, a fearless band,

Two hundred heroes from Vermont, rushed onward, through the flood,

And upward, o'er the rising ground, they marked their way in blood!

The smitten foe before them fled, in terror, from his post-

While, unsustained, two hundred stood, to battle with a host!

Then, turning, as the rallying ranks, with murderous fire replied,

They bore the fallen o'er the field, and through the purple tide!

The fallen! And the first who fell in that unequal strife

Was he whom Mercy sped to save when Justice claimed his life-

The pardoned soldier! And, while yet the conflict raged around-

While yet his life-blood ebbed away through every gaping wound-

While yet his voice grew tremulous, and death bedimmed his eye-

He called his comrades to attest he had not feared to die!

And, in his last expiring breath, a prayer to heaven was sent,

That God, with his unfailing grace, would bless our President!

### “ONLY A PRIVATE” by [Margaret Junkin Preston](http://www.civilwarpoetry.org/authors/preston.htm)

Only a private -- and who will care

When I may pass away,

Or how, or why I perish, or where

I mix with the common clay?

They will fill my empty place again

With another as bold and brave;

And they'll blot me out ere the autumn rain

Has freshened my nameless grave.

Only a private -- it matters not

That I did my duty well,

That all through a score of battles I fought,

And then, like a soldier, I fell.

The country I died for will never heed

My unrequited claim;

And History cannot record the deed,

For she never has heard my name.

Only a private -- and yet I know

When I heard the rallying-call

I was one of the very first to go,

And . . . I'm one of the many who fall:

But as here I lie, it is sweet to feel

That my honor's without a stain, --

That I only fought for my country's weal,

And not for glory or gain.

Only a private -- yet He who reads

Through the guises of the heart,

Looks not at the splendor of the deeds,

But the way we do our part;

And when He shall take us by the hand,

And our small service own,

There'll a glorious band of privates stand

As victors around the throne!

### “[YOUR LETTER, LADY, CAME TOO LATE](http://www.civilwarpoetry.org/confederate/soldierlife/letter_exp.html)” by [Colonel William S. Hawkins](http://www.civilwarpoetry.org/authors/hawkins.html)

Your letter, lady, came too late,

For Heaven had claimed its own.

Ah, sudden change! From prison bars

Unto the Great White Throne!

And yet, I think he would have stayed

To live for his disdain,

Could he have read the careless words

Which you have sent in vain.

So full of patience did he wait

Through many a weary hour,

That o'er his simple soldier faith

Not even death had power.

And you -- did others whisper low

Their homage in your ear,

As though among their shadowy throng

His spirit had a peer.

I would that you were by me now,

To draw the sheet aside,

And see how pure the look he wore

The moment when he died.

The sorrow that you gave him

Had left its weary trace,

As 'twere the shadow of the cross

Upon his pallid face.

"Her love," he said, "could change for me

The winter's cold to spring."

Ah, trust of fickle maiden's love,

Thou art a bitter thing!

For when these valleys bright in May

Once more with blossoms wave,

The northern violets shall blow

Above his humble grave.

Your dole of scanty words had been

But one more pang to bear,

For him who kissed unto the last

Your tress of golden hair.

I did not put it where he said,

For when the angels come

I would not have them find the sign

Of falsehood in the tomb.

I've seen your letter and I know

The wiles that you have wrought

To win that noble heart of his,

And gained it -- cruel thought!

What lavish wealth men sometimes give

For what is worthless all:

What manly bosoms beat for them

In folly's falsest thrall.

You shall not pity him, for now

His sorrow has an end,

Yet would that you could stand with me

Beside my fallen friend.

And I forgive you for his sake

As he -- if it be given --

May even be pleading grace for you

Before the court of heaven.

Tonight the cold wind whistles by

As I my vigil keep

Within the prison dead house, where

Few mourners come to weep.

A rude plank coffin holds his form,

Yet death exalts his face

And I would rather see him thus

Than clasped in your embrace.

Tonight your home may shine with lights

And ring with merry song,

And you be smiling as if your soul

Had done no deadly wrong.

Your hand so fair that none would think

It penned these words of pain;

Your skin so white -- would God your heart

Were half as free from stain.

I'd rather be my comrade dead,

Than you in life supreme:

For yours the sinner's waking dread,

And his the martyr's dream.

Whom serve we in this life, we serve

In that which is to come:

He chose his way, you yours; let God

Pronounce the fitting doom.

### “[ANOTHER YANKEE DOODLE](http://www.civilwarpoetry.org/confederate/soldierlife/anotheryank-exp.html)” by Anonymous

Yankee Doodle had a mind

To whip the Southern traitors,

Because they didn't choose to live

On codfish and potatoes,

Yankee Doodle, doodle-doo,

Yankee Doodle dandy,

And to keep his courage up

He took a drink of brandy.

Yankee Doodle said he found

By all the census figures,

That he could starve the rebels out,

If he could steal their niggers.

Yankee Doodle, doodle-doo,

Yankee Doodle dandy,

And then he took another drink

Of gunpowder and brandy.

Yankee Doodle made a speech;

'Twas very full of feeling;

"I fear," he says, "I cannot fight,

But I am good at stealing."

Yankee Doodle, doodle-doo,

Yankee Doodle dandy,

Hurrah for Lincoln, he's the boy

To take a drop of brandy.

Yankee Doodle drew his sword,

And practiced all the passes;

Come, boys, we'll take another drink

When we get to Manassas.

Yankee Doodle, doodle-doo,

Yankee Doodle dandy,

They never reached Manassas plain,

And never got the brandy.

Yankee Doodle soon found out

That Bull Run was no trifle;

For if the North knew how to steal,

The South knew how to rifle.

Yankee Doodle, doodle-doo,

Yankee Doodle dandy,

'Tis very clear I took too much

Of that infernal brandy.

Yankee Doodle wheeled about,

And scampered off at full run,

And such a race was never seen

As that he made at Bull Run.

Yankee Doodle, doodle-doo,

Yankee Doodle dandy,

I haven't time to stop right now

To take a drop of brandy.

Yankee Doodle, oh! for shame,

You're always intermeddling;

Let guns alone, they're dangerous things;

You'd better stick to peddling.

Yankee Doodle, doodle-doo,

Yankee Doodle dandy,

When next I go to Bully Run

I'll throw away the brandy.

For each poem, consider the following:

1. Who is the speaker?
2. What is the speaker’s tone?
3. What is the purpose or theme of the poem?
4. Name two images that stand out from the poem.
5. Does the poem contain any figurative language? (simile, metaphor, personification) Is there anything unique about the structure? (punctuation, rhyme, refrain, etc)
6. Did you like the poem? Why or why not?