

# “THE VETERAN”

BY

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Underneath the autumn sky,  
Haltingly, the lines go by.  
Ah, would steps were blithe and gay,  
As when first they marched away,  
Smile on lip and curl on brow,—  
Only white-faced gray-beards now,  
Standing on life's outer verge,  
E'en the marches sound a dirge.

Blow, you bugles, play, you fife,  
Rattle, drums, for dearest life.  
Let the flags wave freely so,  
As the marching legions go,  
Shout, hurrah and laugh and jest,  
This is memory at its best.  
(Did you notice at your quip,  
That old comrade's quivering lip?)

Ah, I see them as they come,  
Stumbling with the rumbling drum;  
But a sight more sad to me  
E'en than these ranks could be  
Was that one with cane upraised  
Who stood by and gazed and gazed,  
Trembling, solemn, lips compressed,  
Longing to be with the rest.

Did he dream of old alarms,  
As he stood, "presented arms"?  
Did he think of field and camp  
And the unremitting tramp  
Mile on mile—the lonely guard  
When he kept his midnight ward?  
Did he dream of wounds and scars  
In that bitter war of wars?

What of that? He stood and stands  
In my memory—trembling hands,  
Whitened beard and cane and all  
As if waiting for the call  
Once again: "To arms, my sons,"  
And his ears hear far-off guns,  
Roll of cannon and the tread  
Of the legions of the Dead!