



PATRIOTIC RECOLLECTIONS



The Grayback ^(a)

At the 21st anniversary of Forsyth Post, Toledo, Ohio, General I. R. Sherwood made the following response to the subject assigned him, *The Volunteer*, being a part of a lecture on *Reminiscences of the War*, which he has promised for several soldier campfires the coming season.

Say, comrades of the old war days long gone,
Do you remember, while yet fresh from home,
When in the night the campfire light was low,
And dreams of home and peace would come and go?
Do you remember how you cursed and raved.
When on the 'broidered shirt your sweetheart gave,
You caught in active act, with open maw
The very first grayback you ever saw?

Comrades, as age, it seems, has passed away
Since on the fields of war we met the gray.
The plow, the harrow, and God's grasses green
Have blotted fort and earthwork from the scene;
The hymns of peace and joy are ringing loud
Throughout the land where once hung pall and shroud,
And humor sweet uplifts her snowy hand
And beckons onward to a fairer land!
And yet while memories of the past come back
I feel the grayback crawling up my back!

I see the mountain-tops of Tennessee;
I breathe the ozone air at reveille!
When under Burnside, back in sixty-three
We waded rivers, climbed the Cumberland;
And wrested Knoxville from a hostile land!
The mountain-sides are flecked with fleecy cloud.
That hang upon the summits like a shroud;
The trees are bright in scarlet, gold and green,

Tinged with the Autumn frosts in brilliant sheen!

**Here men with beards white as the mountain snow,
And stalwart maidens in their frocks of tow,
Came forth to greet us in their royal right,
And kiss the stars upon our banner bright.
And while we lay upon that mountain-side
And say the empire of our hopes and pride,
I'd given all I had that very minute
For one boiled shirt with a grayback in it!**

**I see old Kenesaw turn heavenward now,
With big-mouthed cannon on her serried brow!
I hear the muskets rattled down the slopes!
I hear great thunders answering in the copse!
I see grim death stalk in the valley, where
The sweet magnolia perfumes all the air;
I see the shouting men in staggering lines
Where grape in swarths sweeps through the shattered pines!**

**I see great taps made the fearful shell!
Our flag go down! I hear the rebel yell!
And yet beneath each soldier's blouse of blue, Ten thousand graybacks charge, and
claw, and claw!
The battle's earthquake shocks they heeded not!
Awed by no shrieking shell or blistering shot;
While roaring cyclones breath their awful power,
The grayback paused not for a single shot!**

**And when at length the hot June days had passed,
And proud Atlanta fell to us at last,
And we looked back across a hundred days
Of skirmish, fight, and scorch and battle blaze!
While all the North were booming us with praise;
When Sherman issued orders for a rest-
That every soldier in new blue be dressed;
With blouses torn and pants without a seat,
And shirts, with sixty graybacks in each pleat,
Were made into bonfire-far from sweet!
It took just a new crop, fiercer than the old one!**

**And now I lie beneath the August night!
While dying embers glow of campfire light!
I see the shinning stars in silver bars
Wink calmly o'er the sleeping field of Mars.
There is no cover save the steely sky,
There is no music but the nighthawk's cry!
Yet, as I graze into the mellow moon,
I feel the grayback in my pantaloons!
I feel him in my shirt, upon my neck!
His griping grip upon my starboard deck!
I cannot sleep, I cannot rest at all,
For his omniverous bit and ominous crawl!**

And now, at last, we tramp the old North State,
We stand crowned heroes at the golden gate
Of glorious peace! Farewell to war's alarms!
The Blue confronts the Gray with grounded arms!
The Stars and Bars go down, and never more
In this fair land, on hill-top, sea or shore
Will that flag waved again! And then and there
Grant swung his victor eagles, bright with flame
Into the grateful air of peace,-and fame
Wreathed laurels green with his immortal name!

Two armies lay asleep-the Blue, the Gray;
And side by side! Sweet peace had come to stay!
The grayback, too, was there, ten million strong!
He knew no North, no South, no peaceful song!
And by the firefly's flash, the last tattoo,
He clawed and chawed, the same he sued to do!
The same among the Gray as in the Blue!
Only for everyone of Blue, 'tis true,
The prostrate Johnnies had a pair-or two!

Oh, cruel, bloodful chum of awful war,
Of soldier ills the most pestiferous, far;
Oh, crawling, creeping clawing, biting pest,
Of camp and bivouac, the bane of rest!
Oh, nasty gnat of million hatching power!
Born but to crawl and bite through every hour
Of a tired soldiers life! It cannot be
That I shall ever live to long to forget thee!

Why were ye made with that terrific maw?
Why were ye born with that infernal claw?
Why were ye sent a soldier's life to mar
In the camp night bivouacs of cruel war?
To sit on Glory's brow and leave a scar;
To creep, and crawl, and suck heroic blood-
And die between two thumbnails' devilish thud!

(a) Sherwood, I.R. 1892. The grayback, pp 27-28. *IN* Cummings, C.L. *The Great War Relic*. Self published. 48p.

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