



SOLDIERS'
MONUMENT
POEM

The title is rendered in a highly decorative, gothic-style font. The word 'SOLDIERS'' is on the top line, 'MONUMENT' is on the middle line, and 'POEM' is on the bottom line. The letters are filled with a fine, repeating pattern. The text is framed by intricate, symmetrical flourishes. On the left side, there are two crossed rifles. In the center, a small illustration of a monument with a column and a base is visible. The entire design is set against a dark, textured background.

Douglas Featherling
April 1999

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THE PRICE OF THE PRESENT
PAID BY THE PAST:

A POEM

READ AT THE DEDICATION OF

THE SOLDIERS' MONUMENT,

IN THE CITY OF WHEELING, *Mo.,* 1883.

BY

WILLIAM LEIGHTON.

WHEELING:

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION.

1883.

THE PRICE OF THE PRESENT
PAID BY THE PAST.

I.

WHERE once Troy stood no monument appears;
But Homer's song survives the perished years—
'Tis older than the oldest thing we know,
To honor men by building up a pile
Of monumental stone: ay, long ago,
Ere history began, beside the Nile
The sons of Egypt built a pyramid
Unto their king—the dust of ages hid
His name. May this carved granite, happily,

(3)

Proclaim our honored ones enduringly:
Or if time levels all that mankind rears,
May this fair stone endure as many years
As the lone Sphinx hath sat in Egypt's sand,
Or as the oldest pyramid shall stand.
But when harsh years these crumbling stones decay,
The deeds they honor shall not pass away:
A stronger record holds each hero's name,
And deathless stars forever hymn his fame;
For while Eternal Goodness rules o'er men
Each higher act employs an angel's pen.

II.

PROSPERITY, thy hand
Hath touched Dame Fortune's wheel; and, lo!
Forth in profusion pours the flow
Of plenty in the land.
We hear the cheerful din arise

From busy workshops; and our eyes
Behold the ponderous railroad train,
Laden with freight of western grain,
Go puffing through our valley to the sea.
Our produce, borne to eastern strands,
Feeds hungry mouths in starving lands
Wasted by blight of sad adversity.

From Ireland came pale Famine's wail;
Nor did it cry without avail;
Forth from our shores the succors sped
To fill those starving mouths with bread,
And still the cries that called so piteously.

III.

IN famous days long past
Rome built an empire vast
Where'er a conqueror's sword her mighty armies led:
Now a new power is born;

We send the nations corn ;
And, in the place of war, fill foreign lands with bread.

IV.

THE produce of our fields
Through commerce richly yields
 No stinted store :
France sends her fabrics fair ;
England, her skill-wrought ware ;
No land but yields its share ;
And Ocean deigns to bear
The tribute to our shore.
Though winds and waters roar,
And Neptune bellows o'er his stormy main,
 His anger is in vain ;
The power of steam defies his wrath,
And cuts through tossing waves a path,
 Bringing of all the best

To our great Nation of the West:
While deep below his noisy seas,
Through the long wire, come messages
 That friendly greetings bring
 From many an old-world king
To crownless kings that hold our new-world sovereignties.

v.

WHILE other lands by want oppressed
 Cry hungrily,
Here are our hearts with plenty blessed;
 And Liberty
Her ægis o'er our nation flings,
While Peace, her gentle sister, brings
 Her golden ministry:
And all the perils of the past,
That War around our hearth-stones cast,
 Have ceased to be,

That the bright goddess of the free,
 Leaning upon her sword, may stand
 And view a happy, prosperous land
Stretched broadly out from sea to sea.

VI.

 Not boastfully
Of these, our blessings, let us tell ;
Nor proud conceit our bosoms swell ;
 But thankfully
For all the kindness Heaven hath sent,
For all the bounties God hath lent,
 Let our glad hearts declare
 That we His grateful children are.

VII.

PEACE and content—

Far other were those fiercer days
When all the nation was ablaze,
And our dear land by inward ravage rent.
Ah, not yet wholly healed,
The painful, gaping wounds that then were made
When brother 'gainst his brother stood arrayed
On many a bloody field,
And War unloosed his iron-throated dogs to tear
With angry strife;
Nor Pity's voice could make the cruel cannon spare
One human life!

VIII.

WAR cried unceasingly,
Like the fierce Aztec deity,

“Heap up for me,
High on my bloody shrine, the promise of the land—
The bravest and the best the country hath;
Send forth a chosen band
Each day to feed my burning wrath!”

IX.

AND they went forth—
Alas, full dearly did we pay
For the prosperity that smiles to-day!—
And North and South,
With the best blood in all the land, made red
The battle-fields where their brave soldiers bled,
And heaped the earth with dead.

X.

HARK to each heavy peal
As cannon shots resound;

Even the strong hills reel
 And tremble with the sound!—
Now through the rifts of smoke-clouds see
 The gleaming lines go by,
 And battle-flags that o'er them fly,
Torn by sharp rifle-shots and the death-winged artillery.
Disordered by that dreadful rain
 Are all the glittering lines;
But o'er them sweeps the smoke again,
 On which the sunlight shines,
Painting the veil that hides the dead
 With beauty to the eye;
But, ah! beneath, the earth is red
 With tint of deeper dye.

XI.

STRETCHED on his hospital cot
When fever racked each wasted limb,—

O hapless lot!—
Weary were days and nights with him;
Or, far away
From his lone bed of woe and pain,
Remembrance led him home again,
Guiding the weary soldier's wandering
Where memory had a magic charm to bring
Again the day
When, from his friends and home departing,
A mother's tears fell on his cheek,
Telling the love she could not speak
For sobbing;
Or loving lips were pressed to his
In tender farewell of a kiss
That memory
Had treasured from that hour to this
How fondly!

XII.

THAT home he never more may see,
Save in hot fever's phantasy ;
But in his cot of pain alone
Must yield up life with dying moan ;
No friendly ear to hear the sighs,
 His last of earthly sorrowing,
 Ere, rising on its heavenly wing,
Homeward at last his spirit flies.

XIII.

AND shall I tell
Of all the hardships that befell,—
The cruel tortures of the heart and brain,
Famine, and pain,—
 Him whose sad fate
Bade him a prisoner long remain,

Sadly to wait
The turning of his prison key,
To wait and sigh for liberty!

XIV.

So suffered they
Whose monument we dedicate to-day.
 War's iron rain,
 Fever, and pain,
 The weary waiting, and the galling chain
Of dull imprisonment,
With sundered ties of home, and banishment—
All these did they endure that we
More fortunate might be ;
 And broad o'er all the land,
 From east to western strand,
Our country might be blessed with glad prosperity.

XV.

THEN let no niggard meed
Of honor grace each deed
 So bravely done
On every battle-field whose name,
Engraven here, records the fame
 Our countrymen have won ;
That patriots yet to be,—
 While still within the land
 Such monuments shall stand,—
May bless the memory
Of those who freely gave
Their blood and lives to save
And keep our nation great and glorious still,
And free, and indivisible.

XVI.

So may the future days
Come nobly to our State:
When, prosperous and great,
Her citizens shall praise
Those who gave life and all to consecrate
Their land to liberty;
And bade their watchword be
These words in granite here,
To freemen ever dear,
MONTANI SEMPER LIBERI.

