

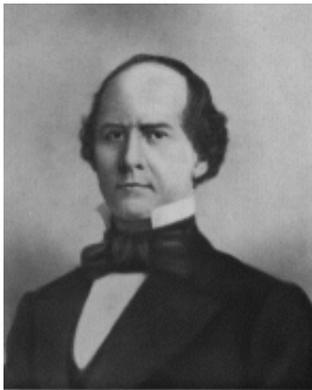


THE BIVOUAC OF THE DEAD

by Theodore O'Hara

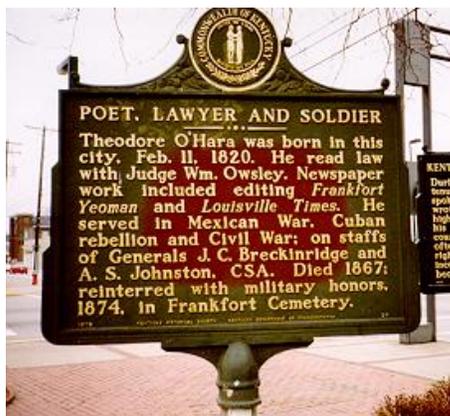


Theodore O'Hara



Theodore O'Hara is one of the few poets whose title to immortality rests on a single poem, but whose reputation on that account is secure. Born on February 11, 1820, in Danville, KY, the family subsequently moved to Frankfort. Theodore was a very precocious child, and academic study was a passion. He attended school at St. Joseph's Academy in Bardstown, KY, where he became a noted and accomplished scholar. He went on to study law, with one of his fellow students being John C. Breckinridge, later to become US Vice President under Buchanan, Brigadier General of the Confederate Army, and Confederate Secretary of War.

Poet, Lawyer, and Soldier



In 1845, O'Hara held a position in the Treasury Department in Washington, DC, but soon joined the US Army, with the rank of captain. He served with distinction through the Mexican War, and was breveted major for gallant and meritorious conduct. Following the war, he practiced law in Washington City until 1851, when he joined with other Kentuckians in assisting Spanish Major General Narciso Lopez, in his attempt to liberate Cuba.

O'Hara was at one time editor-in-chief of the *Mobile Register*, and later, editor of the *Louisville Times* and *Frankfort Yeoman*. At the onset of the Civil War, he cast his fortunes with the South, and was placed in command as colonel of the Twelfth Alabama Regiment. He later served on the staff of General

Albert Sidney Johnston, and was with him at Shiloh when the general was mortally wounded. It was Theodore O'Hara who caught the great commander in his arms when the bullet did its deadly deed. He afterwards became chief-of-staff to his lifelong friend, General John C. Breckinridge.

O'Hara died in 1867, on a plantation near Guerrytown, AL, and was buried in Columbus, GA. In 1874, his remains, together with those of Revolutionary War soldiers and former Kentucky governors, Christopher Greenup and George Madison, plus several distinguished officers of the Mexican War, were reinterred in the state cemetery in Frankfort, KY.

THE BIVOUC OF THE DEAD



The muffled drum's sad roll has beat
The soldier's last tattoo;
No more on Life's parade shall meet
That brave and fallen few.
On Fame's eternal camping-ground
Their silent tents to spread,
And glory guards with solemn round
The bivouac of the dead.

No rumor of the foe's advance
Now swells upon the wind;
Nor troubled thought of midnight haunts
Of loved ones left behind;
No vision of the morrow's strife
The warrior's dreams alarms;
No braying horn or screaming fife
At dawn shall call to arms.

Their shivered swords are red with rust,
Their plumed heads are bowed,
Their haughty banner, trailed in dust,
Is now their martial shroud.
And plenteous funeral tears have washed
The red stains from each brow,
And the proud forms, by battle gashed,
Are free from anguish now.

The neighing troop, the flashing blade,
The bugle's stirring blast,
The charge, the dreadful cannonade,
The din and shout, are past;
Nor war's wild notes, nor glory's peal
Shall thrill with fierce delight
Those breasts that nevermore shall feel
The rapture of the fight.

Like the fierce Northern hurricane
That sweeps the great plateau,
Flushed with the triumph, yet to gain,
Come down the serried foe,
Who heard the thunder of the fray
Break o'er the field beneath,
Knew the watchword of the day
Was "Victory or death!"

Long had the doubtful conflict raged
O'er all that stricken plain,
For never fiercer fight had waged
The vengeful blood of Spain;
And still the storm of battle blew,
Still swelled the glory tide;
Not long, our stout old Chieftain knew,
Such odds his strength could bide.

'Twas in that hour his stern command
Called to a martyr's grave
The flower of his beloved land,
The nation's flag to save.
By rivers of their father's gore
His first-born laurels grew,
And well he deemed the sons would pour
Their lives for glory too.

For many a mother's breath has swept
O'er Angostura's plain --
And long the pitying sky has wept
Above its moldered slain.
The raven's scream, or eagle's flight,
Or shepherd's pensive lay,
Alone awakes each sullen height
That frowned o'er that dread fray.

Sons of the Dark and Bloody Ground
Ye must not slumber there,
Where stranger steps and tongues resound
Along the heedless air.
Your own proud land's heroic soil
Shall be your fitter grave;
She claims from war his richest spoil --
The ashes of her brave.

Thus 'neath their parent turf they rest,
Far from the gory field,
Borne to a Spartan mother's breast
On many a bloody shield;
The sunshine of their native sky
Smiles sadly on them here,
And kindred eyes and hearts watch by
The heroes sepulcher.

Rest on, embalmed and sainted dead!
Dear is the blood ye gave;
No impious footstep here shall tread
The herbage of your grave;
Nor shall your glory be forgot
While Fame her record keeps,
For honor points the hallowed spot
Where valor proudly sleeps.

Yon marble minstrel's voiceless stone
In deathless song shall tell,
When many a vanquished ago has flown,
The story how ye fell;
Nor wreck, nor change, nor winter's blight,
Nor time's remorseless doom,
Can dim one ray of glory's light
That gilds your deathless tomb.

- THEODORE O'HARA