

19 EXEMPT (Anonymous)

Exempt! from what? a knapsack, gun,
A blanket and a uniform;
Some weary marches in the sun,
And nights outdoors amid the storm.
That's all:--my boy, I pray you wait
Before you laugh and say "all right!"
Your papers have not waived your fate,
You have the battle yet to fight!
Exempt! come, have you brains, a tongue
Exempt! come, have you brains, a tongue,
Within your breast a living heart?
Then stand where you belong, among
The men who fight on Freedom's part!
You need not search to find a foe;
Behold, he meets you in the street.
He follows you where're you go.
He flings himself beneath your feet.
Stand to your guns! be brave and calm;
Beware the foe with whom you deal,
His mouth is full of deadly harm,
His lies are worse than cutting steel.
Exempt! there's no such thing, my boy!
You're not exempt while war endures.
Think you your pale face can destroy
Your country's right to you and yours!
Exempt! no more of that poor word
Or fill it with a better sense;
So shall your country's voice be heard,
A calling you to her defense!

Sources:

Boston Transcript, August 18, 1863.

Newsboy, October-November, 1981.