

49 LAST WORDS

"Dear Charlie," breathed a soldier,
"O comrade true and tried,
Who in the heat of battle
 Pressed closely to my side;
I feel that I am stricken,
 My life is ebbing fast;
I fain would have you with me,
 Dear Charlie, till the last.

"It seems so sudden, Charlie,
 To think to-morrow's sun
Will look upon me lifeless,
 And I not twenty-one!
I little dreamed this morning,
 "Twould bring my last campaign;
God's ways are not as our ways,
 And I will not complain.

"There's one at home, dear Charlie,
 Will mourn for me when dead,
Whose heart -- it is a mother's --
 Can scarce be comforted.
You'll write and tell her, Charlie,
 With my dear love, that I
Fought bravely as a soldier should,
 And died as he should die.

"And you will tell her, Charlie,
 She must not grieve too much,
Our country claims our young lives,
 For she has need of such.
And where is he would falter,
 Or turn ignobly back,
When Duty's voice cries 'Forward,'
 And honor lights the track?

"And there's another, Charlie
 (His voice became more low),
When thoughts of *her* come o'er me,
 It makes it hard to go.

This locket in my bosom,
She gave me just before
I left my native village
For the fearful scenes of war.

"Give her this message, Charlie,
Sent with my dying breath,
To her and to my banner
I'm 'faithful unto death.'
And if, in that far country
Which I am going to,
Our earthly ties may enter,
I'll there my love renew.

"Come nearer, closer, Charlie,
My head I fain would rest,
It must be for the last time,
Upon your faithful breast.
Dear friend, I cannot tell you
How in my heart I feel
The depth of your devotion,
Your friendship strong as steel.

"We've watched and camped together
In sunshine and in rain;
We've shared the toils and perils
Of more than one campaign;
And when my tired feet faltered,
Beneath the noon tide heat,
Your words sustained my courage,
Gave new strength to my feet.

"And once, -- 'twas at Antietam, --
Pressed hard by thronging foes,
I almost sank exhausted
Beneath their cruel blows, --
When you, dear friend, undaunted,
With headlong courage threw
Your *heart* into the contest,
And safely brought me through.

"My words are weak, dear Charlie,
My breath is growing scant;
Your hand upon my heart -- there,
Can you not hear me pant?
Your thoughts I know will wander
Sometimes to where I lie --
How dark it grows! True comrade
And faithful friend, good-by!"

A moment, and he lay there
A statue, pale and calm,
His youthful head reclining
Upon his comrade's arm.
His limbs upon the greensward
Were stretched in careless grace,
And by the fitful moon was seen
A smile upon his face.

Sources:

- Boston Transcript, June 24, 1863.
Christian Register, September 5, 1863.
Lyrics of Loyalty, 1864.
Pen Pictures of the War, 1864.
Grand'ther Baldwin's Thanksgiving, 1875.
Alger Street, 1964.
Newsboy, October, 1970.