

# WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

*The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song*

## The Blue and the Gray

FRANCIS MILES FINCH

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*Francis Miles Finch (1827–1907), a judge, law professor, and poet, was deeply moved by the story of the women of Columbus, Mississippi, who in 1866—only a year after the end of the Civil War—decorated the graves of both Union and Confederate dead. Seeing the moment as a symbol of reconciliation, Finch composed “The Blue and the Gray” as a commemoration.*

*What are the mood and tone of the poem? What is the effect of the recurring four-line refrain, “Under the sod and the dew. . . .”? What evidence does Finch offer to demonstrate the equal worth of the Blue and the Gray dead? How does this poem’s approach to reconciliation compare with that taken by Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address (above)? Can one properly remember and honor the dead—not just in the Civil War, but in any war—if one ignores or rejects the cause for which they fought and died? Might not genuine reconciliation require an affirmation of the principles over which the battle was fought—and which only one side won?*

By the flow of the inland river,  
Whence the fleets of iron have fled,  
Where the blades of the grave-grass quiver,  
Asleep are the ranks of the dead:—  
Under the sod and the dew,  
Waiting the Judgment Day:—  
Under the one, the Blue;  
Under the other, the Gray.

These in the robings of glory,  
Those in the gloom of defeat,  
All with the battle-blood gory,  
In the dusk of eternity meet:—  
Under the sod and the dew,  
Waiting the Judgment Day:—  
Under the laurel, the Blue;  
Under the willow, the Gray.

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From the silence of sorrowful hours,  
The desolate mourners go,  
Lovingly laden with flowers,  
Alike for the friend and the foe:—  
Under the sod and the dew,  
Waiting the Judgment Day:—  
Under the roses, the Blue;  
Under the lilies, the Gray.

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So, with an equal splendor,  
The morning sun-rays fall,  
With a touch impartially tender,  
On the blossoms blooming for all:—  
Under the sod and the dew,  
Waiting the Judgment Day  
Brodered with gold, the Blue;  
Mellowed with gold, the Gray.

So, when the summer calleth,  
On forest and field of grain,  
With an equal murmur falleth  
The cooling drip of the rain:—  
Under the sod and the dew,  
Waiting the Judgment Day:—  
Wet with the rain, the Blue;  
Wet with the rain, the Gray.

Sadly, but not with upbraiding,  
The generous deed was done.  
In the storm of the years that are fading  
No braver battle was won:—  
Under the sod and the dew,  
Waiting the Judgment Day:—  
Under the blossoms, the Blue;  
Under the garlands, the Gray.

No more shall the war-cry sever,

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Or the winding rivers be red:  
They banish our anger forever  
When they laurel the graves of our dead!  
Under the sod and the dew,  
Waiting the Judgment Day:—  
Love and tears for the Blue;  
Tears and love for the Gray.

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