

Robert G. Shaw

When War's red banners trailed along the sky,
 And many a manly heart grew all aflame
 With patriotic love and purest aim,
 There rose a noble soul who dared to die,
 If only Right could win. He heard the cry 5
 Of struggling bondmen and he quickly came,
 Leaving the haunts where Learning tenders fame
 Unto her honored sons; for it was ay
 A loftier cause that lured him on to death.
 Brave men who saw their brothers held in chains, 10
 Beneath his standard battled ardently.
 O friend! O hero! thou who yielded breath
 That others might share Freedom's priceless gains,
 In rev'rent love we guard thy memory.

Note

Robert G.[ould] Shaw was the white commander of the Massachusetts 54th Infantry, the first black regiment raised in the North in the Civil War. Colonel Shaw and many of his soldiers were killed in the battle of Fort Wagner, South Carolina in 1863 and were buried together on the battlefield. Some forty poems (four by black poets) and several monuments and paintings honor Shaw.

Joan R. Sherman, ed., African-American Poetry of the
 Nineteenth Century: An Anthology (Urbana:
 University of Illinois Press, 1992)