

Hid Treasure
(The Labours of a Deacon)

Canto III

The god of day had sunk to rest,
Down to his chamber in the west,
And Luna's mild and placid beam,
Shone on the Earth with silver gleam,
While not a blade or leaf was stirred,
And not a passing sound was heard,
Save, from a distant lonely hill,
A solitary whippoorwill,
Did pipe his melancholy lay,
A requiem of departed day,
Or slowly booming on the ear
The owl droned forth his music drear,
Alas! That calm, so still and hallowed,
So soon should be in discord swallowed;
For now a wild and fearful yell,
Rose from the valiant sentinel.
Again, again, it echoed round
Like the fierce baying of a hound;
Then louder, wilder still it rose
Accompanied by sound of blows.
Alarmed, the timid whippoorwill,
Shrinks into silence and is still;
His note suspends the cautious owl,
—Wisdom's own bird, Minerva's fowl.
The dread portents of strife and fear,
The Deacon and his party hear,
Each asking each, with bated breath
“What mean these sounds of war and death?”
Then one less timid than the rest
Arose and thus his mind expressed:
“Doubtless my friends from sounds we hear,
“A dreadful conflict rages near.
“I fear some evil has befell,
“Our brave and trusty sentinel,
“And we like men at once should go
“And aid him to repel the foe;
“To leave a comrade in such case
“Were surely dastardly and base;
“And it would cling to us beside
“A stigma on our wounded pride.”

“O! rash and inexperienced man”—
The prudent Deacon than began,
“I will maintain that such advice
“Is injudicious and unwise.
“Far better one brave man should fall
“Than rashly to imperil all;
“Far better for awhile to hide
“Than rush on danger, all untried,
“Or unprepared to meet a foe
“So little of whose strength we know.
“As for the plea of wounded pride,
“That feeling should be mortified.
“Was it not pride first brought disgrace
“And ruin to our mortal race?
“And now rush we know not where,
“Might bring us wounds more hard to bare.
“Safety is dear to every heart,
“Discretion’s ‘valour’s better part’
“’Tis ‘distance’ says the poet too,
“That ‘lends enchantment to the view.’
“I move we do ascend a tree.”
'Twas seconded by two or three.
And then unanimously carried,
As you must own, for no man tarried.
To give dissent, but speedily
Betook him to the nearest tree,
And there away the thickest branches,
Did crouch himself upon his hunches;
Where I shall leave them, now, and till
The story of the Sentinel.

Down in the glen’s secluded notch,
Where that brave man, kept ward and watch,
Over the water’s broad expanse
He gazed with apprehensive glance,
When lo! a skiff approached the shore,
With stealthy glide and silent oar;
Nearer and nearer came to land
Until its bows were on the strand;
Then on the margin of the flood,
Tall and erect an Indian stood.
In his right hand a torch burned clear,
His left hand grasped a lobster spear,
And by the torches fitful glare
O’er his brown face and uncombed hair,

He seemed to be from top to toe
A rude and formidable foe.
The Sentinel with stern commands,
The password and countersign demands,
Again demands—but no reply.
“Traitor! the signal or you die.”
He shouted out with angry voice
“Death or the password, make your choice.”
The Indian taken by surprise,
Did many curious things surmise;
Was it a form of flesh and blood
That thus menaced him from the wood?
Or spirit of some ancient brave
Still lingering near its island grave?
He thus appeared by fear and doubt
Broken accents stammered out:—
“You berry bierce, what for you call?
“Sartin me, do no harm at all;
“No squaw, no dog here haven you;
“You sartin Indian or Mundoo.*
“What for you stayem here in dark?
“Me only come to peelem bark,
“Me makem torch, then go away
“And spearem lobster in the bay.”
“Hold!” cried the Sentinel, “this tale
“With me, vile wretch, will not avail.
“A man like me you can’t deceive,
“Your purpose is pimp and thief.
“I know you by your form and face,
“Of Saxon or of Celtic race,
“And not as you would represent
“Of Aztec or Toltec† decent.
“But patience is exhausted now,
“Nor further parley I’ll allow.”
Then lifting up a stone to throw,
As did great Ajax long ago;
As did the Judean shepherd boy,
Gath’s stalwart giant to destroy,
Awhile he poised his arm on high
To gaze his mark and then let fly.
Unlike his prototypes, his aim,
Was too remote to kill or maim.
Such mode of fight to him well known,
The Indian centred every stone
True to its blank, with greater skill,
Than oft is shown at musket drill.

Where at the Sentinel in rage,
Rushed in close combat to engage,
And with his dexterous hand essayed
In haste to draw his trenchant blade,
To split his foeman like a clapboard;
But it had rusted in its scabbard,
And all his force was spent in vain,
Nor fast the weapon did remain,
Then finding it could not be drawn,
He used it with the sheath there on,
Swinging it round in circles wide,
But with more rage than skill to guide,
Now from the fury of the foe,
Retiring stubbornly and show
The Indian, with his lobster spear
Made a diversion in the rear.
Foiled by the shortness of his glaive
His hinder parts he could not save.
To hold his own he could but strive
Till reinforcements should arrive,
And ever up the dusky glen,
His fancy saw the coming men.
Delusive fancy far alas!
'Twas but the shadow on the grass,
Projected by the sombre pines
Waving aloft their quivering spines.
'Twas thus if history sayeth true
The Iron Duke at Waterloo,
Gazed o'er the hills with anxious glance
For signs of Blucher's slow advance.
But ah! for him of lesser fame
No might availed, no Blucher came,
He therefore saw, at any price
He must obtain an armistice;
"Hold! valiant aboriginal"
Softly exclaimed the Sentinel
"Yielding to prowess and to fate
"I offer to capitulate.
"If you object to that expression
"I will surrender at discretion,
"For, to your aim I find that I,
"Am but a target and 'cockshy.'
"The spoils of war are truly thine,
"Therefore these weapons I resign.
"This sword and belt O gallant sachem!
"Are yours by conquest—do you tak'em?"

“No” said the Indian “Sartin no,
You buy’em lobster and me go”
Thou sage instructed in the wild,
By no learned sophistries beguiled,
Whose soul was never ‘taught to stray
To solar path or milky way,’
Diplomatists to thee might turn
O nature’s nobleman! And learn
Conquest is godlike, taught to spare,
And not to strip the conquered bare.
The Sentinel too glad to find
A peace concluded to his mind.
The purchase made with thankful heart,
And took his lobsters to depart,
While faithful to his truce and true,
The Indian boarded his canoe,
And steering from the isle away,
Was lost in darkness up the bay.
Now with a hamper on his back
Our hero takes the shoreward track
Nor stays his progress till he sees
His comrades, roosting in the trees,
Who, reassured did soon descend
To greet their champion and their friend.
And then the Deacon quick explained
The reason why they had remained
In that strange post of elevation
’Twas for the sake of observation.
By rules of tactics he could prove
It was a strategic move,
And no mere skulking artifice
To be ascribed to cowardice.

Quoth he “In contests such as this
“E’en air balloons are not amiss.”
The sentinel grew eloquent
About the sweat and blood he’d spent,
But yet his wounds did not locate
Lest envious minds should speculate,
Whether a wound may be as sore
Behind a man as ’tis before!
He merely said “The foe infernal
“I fear has given me wounds internal.
“Against strong odds I did contend,
“Our rights and honour to defend
“Till victory did reward my toil,

“And in this hamper lies the spoil”

“These curious fish,” the Deacon said,
“When they are boiled, becoming red,
“Are nicknamed ‘soldiers’ from the hue
“Their uniform presents to view.
“Since thou a conqueror home didst bear
“These trophies which a prince might share
“This shell fish rampant well might be
“Fitting heraldic charge for thee,
“Emblazoned thus by knightly rules,
“Argent, a lobster rampant, gules”
Then turning he addressed the cook
Who lingered near his sheltering nook,
“Go dress these fish, contrive a feast
“In honour of our friend and guest;
“With your best skill have them prepared,
“I pray, let no adjunct be spared,
“Bring vinegar and pepper bring
“With finest salt for seasoning,
“For, be it known that we this day,
“a debt of gratitude would pay,
“As when some chief, abroad who earns
“His country’s favours, home returns,
“His praise doth parliament proclaim
“And thank him in the nation’s name.
“Thy deeds the theme of many a tongue
“By martial, minstrels shall he sung,
“And epic poets shall rehearse
“Thy triumphs in heroic verse.
“But wearied nature needs repose
“Forget awhile your toils and woes
“On yon smooth, grassy knoll recline,
“And to sweet sleep your cares resign;
“Until a savoury bouquet steams;
“Sleep on brave heart and pleasant dreams.”

Then to the beach with might and main
They hurried to their task again,
And vigorously the work resumed
Till a dark mass in part exhumed
Glanced in the moonbeams dusky light
A moment, and was lost to sight;
For now to their untold dismay
A cry arose “the dam gives way!”
At first a small and feeble gush,

Increasing to a torrent's rush
If filled their excavation up
Like water pouring in a cup.
As when a stout ship springs a leak,
The crew to know their danger seek
And by the carpenter are told
Of using water in the hold.
Round on the pumps they nimbly ply,
Knowing their fate, 'to do or die.'
So these with equal courage strove
To save their well earned treasure trove,
Back beating the encroaching tide,
Which yet crept on with stealthy glide,
Until the level of its source
It gained and drove them back, perforce.
Then climbed they up the oozy bank,
Upon the ground exhausted sank,
And loud and long lamenting lay,
Prospective fortune snatched away.

Cried Deacon F__ "I will go down,
"I'll find that treasure or I'll drown."
Said Elder D__ "Forbear! Forbear!
"Thy rash intention to declare;
"A wise and cautious general
"Incurs not dangers personal
"But guides the action from a spot
"Beyond the range of shell or shot;
"If he the conflict enters in,
"Less ample chance hath he to win,
"And if a ball let out his brains
"Loses a pension for his pains.
"So without risk precarious, he
"Combats the foe vicariously,
"Till victory does for him declare
"And then he gets the lions share.
"Amphibious thing like seal or otter
"May venture in such depths of water
"But for a Deacon to go in,
"Up to his very neck and chin,
"Is to all precedent opposed,
"And, needful, cannot be supposed."

A moment brief the Deacon stood,
Threw off his cloths, then stark and nude,
With wary glance and cautious tread

Adorn the sloping bank did wade,
And with a guiding pole in hand
He probed and sounded in the sand,
Until he touched some solid thing,
Which seemed metallic by its ring,
Then cautiously, one foot upraised
Was on the solid substance placed,
And making a prodigious stride,
His shoulders rose above the tide.
“I’m on it now” the Deacon cries
“And can describe its shape and size;
“My feet which are six inches wide
“Scarce cover it placed scale by side,
“Moreover too my toe it pinches
“To wear a shoe of sixteen inches
“And thrice their length does scarce include
“This precious box in longitude.
“I speak of length and height alone
“The depth of course is yet unknown.”
Just as the crane or bittern treads
The shiny ooze in which it feeds,
Intent his fishy ford to see,
– Or froggy as the case may be –
So cautious moving, to and fro
The Deacon wades and feels below,
Until at length he found a place,
For noose or grappling to embrace.
There making fast the tackle chain
He waved his hand, the hawsers strain
– “Bowse on the windlass. Yeo! Heave ho!” –
Up from its oozing bed below
A massive weight suspended hung
And at the puppet swayed and swung
Oh! Then what fears, what hopes intense
Were in that moment of suspense.
The balance held aloft by height
Was trembling ’neath a doubtful weight,
One anxious moment, to decide
It fell the beam to fortunes’ side.
Say muse for thou caus’st draw the veil,
How fell the beam? how turned the scale?

Strange irony their hopes to mock,
’Twas but the fragment of a rock,
By nature fashioned smooth and square,
As though man’s skill had placed it there!

Moreover without doubt was it,
The rock on which the Deacon split,
For in the dark, and none to blame,
His nose with it in contact came,
And with much loss of blood and pain
The nasal porch was cleft in twain
Making it hideous to the eye,
Forever since it stand awry.

And now the bitter end is shown,
Pray reader make the case your own,
How would you feel, thus vexed and crossed
Your hopes cut short, your labour lost?
Alas! the Deacon, weary man
Foiled in his dearly cherished plan,
Declares that destiny or fate
His failure did predestinate.
And Elder D__ who plain sees
Fortunes are made by slow degrees,
A peddler long since became,
—Or travelling merchant—'tis the same.

As for the valiant sentinel,
To him a better fortune fell
A rich old uncle having died,
Left him a farm, and cash beside,
When he, his good estate to share
Married a spinster young and fair.
The nameless ones who toiled and strove
So earnestly for treasure trove,
Their fortunes may be simply told
By word brief, but suggestive—sold!

And now this bootless search for gold
In unpretentious rhyme is told,
If you the point or moral see
Kind reader, make it known to me.