

The Scout Toward Aldie

By Herman Melville

The cavalry-camp lies on the slope
Of what was late a vernal hill,
But now like a pavement bare—
An outpost in the perilous wilds
Which ever are lone and still;
But Mosby's men are there—
Of Mosby best beware.
Great trees the troopers felled, and leaned
In antlered walls about their tents;
Strict watch they kept; 'twas Hark! and Mark!
Unarmed none cared to stir abroad
For berries beyond their forest-fence:
As glides in seas the shark,
Rides Mosby through green dark.
All spake of him, but few had seen
Except the maimed ones or the low;
Yet rumor made him every thing—
A farmer – woodman – refugee—
The man who crossed the field but now;
A spell about his life did cling—
Who to the ground shall Mosby bring?
The morning-bugles lonely play,
Lonely the evening-bugle calls—
Unanswered voices in the wild;
The settled hush of birds in nest
Becharms, and all the wood enthalls:
Memory's self is so beguiled
That Mosby seems a satyr's child.
They lived as in the Eerie Land—
The fire-flies showed with fairy gleam;
And yet from pine-tops one might ken
The Capitol dome – hazy – sublime—
A vision breaking on a dream:
So strange it was that Mosby's men
Should dare to prowl where the Dome was seen.
A scout toward Aldie broke the spell—
The Leader lies before his tent
Gazing at heaven's all-cheering lamp
Through blandness of a morning rare;
His thoughts on bitter-sweets are bent:
His sunny bride is in the camp—
But Mosby – graves are beds of damp!
The trumpet calls; he goes within; But none the
prayer and sob may know:
Her hero he, but bridegroom too.
Ah, love in a tent is a queenly thing,

And fame, be sure, refines the vow;
But fame fond wives have lived to rue,
And Mosby's men fell deeds can do.
Tan-tara! tan-tara! tan-tara!
Mounted and armed he sits a king;
For pride she smiles if now she peep—
Elate he rides at the head of his men;
He is young, and command is a boyish thing:
They file out into the forest deep—
Do Mosby and his rangers sleep?
The sun is gold, and the world is green,
Opal the vapors of morning roll;
The champing horses lightly prance—
Full of caprice, and the riders too
Curving in many a caricole.
But marshaled soon, by fours advance—
Mosby had checked that airy dance.
By the hospital-tent the cripples stand—
Bandage, and crutch, and cane, and sling,
And palely eye the brave array;
The froth of the cup is gone for them
(Caw! caw! the crows through the blueness wing);
Yet these were late as bold, as gay;
But Mosby – a clip, and grass is hay.
How strong they feel on their horses free,
Tingles the tendoned thigh with life;
Their cavalry-jackets make boys of all—
With golden breasts like the oriole;
The chat, the jest, and laugh are rife.
But word is passed from the front – a call
For order; the wood is Mosby's hall.
To which behest one rider sly
(Spurred, but unarmed) gave little heed—
Of dexterous fun not slow or spare,
He teased his neighbors of touchy mood,
Into plungings he pricked his steed:
A black-eyed man on a coal-black mare,
Alive as Mosby in mountain air.
His limbs were long, and large and round;
He whispered, winked – did all but shout:
A healthy man for the sick to view; The taste in his
mouth was sweet at morn;
Little of care he cared about.
And yet of pains and pangs he knew—
In others, maimed by Mosby's crew.
The Hospital Steward – even he

(Sacred in person as a priest),
And on his coat-sleeve broidered nice
Wore the caduceus, black and green.
No wonder he sat so light on his beast;
This cheery man in suit of price
Not even Mosby dared to slice.
They pass the picket by the pine
And hollow log – a lonesome place;
His horse adroop, and pistol clean;
'Tis cocked – kept leveled toward the wood;
Strained vigilance ages his childish face.
Since midnight has that stripling been
Peering for Mosby through the green.
Splashing they cross the freshet-flood,
And up the muddy bank they strain;
A horse at the spectral white-ash shies—
One of the span of the ambulance,
Black as a hearse. They give the rein:
Silent speed on a scout were wise,
Could cunning baffle Mosby's spies.
Rumor had come that a band was lodged
In green retreats of hills that peer
By Aldie (famed for the swordless charge.
Much store they'd heaped of captured arms
And, peradventure, pilfered cheer;
For Mosby's lads oft hearts enlarge
In revelry by some gorge's marge.
"Don't let your sabres rattle and ring;
To his oat-bag let each man give heed—
There now, that fellow's bag's untied,
Sowing the road with the precious grain.
Your carbines swing at hand – you need!
Look to yourselves, and your nags beside,
Men who after Mosby ride."
Picked lads and keen went sharp before—
A guard, though scarce against surprise;
And rearmost rode an answering troop,
But flankers none to right or left.
No bugle peals, no pennon flies:
Silent they sweep, and fail would swoop
On Mosby with an Indian whoop.
On, right on through the forest land, Nor man, nor
maid, nor child was seen—
Not even a dog. The air was still;
The blackened hut they turned to see,
And spied charred benches on the green;
A squirrel sprang from the rotting mill

Whence Mosby sallied late, brave blood to spill.
By worn-out fields they cantered on—
Drear fields amid the woodlands wide;
By cross-roads of some olden time,
In which grew groves; by gate-stones down—
Grassed ruins of secluded pride:
A strange lone land, long past the prime,
Fit land for Mosby or for crime.
The brook in the dell they pass. One peers
Between the leaves: "Ay, there's the place—
There, on the oozy ledge—'twas there
We found the body (Blake's you know);
Such whirlings, gurglings round the face—
Shot drinking! Well, in war all's fair—
So Mosby says. The bough – take care!"
Hard by, a chapel. Flower-pot mould
Danked and decayed the shaded roof;
The porch was punk; the clapboards spanned
With ruffled lichens gray or green;
Red coral-moss was not aloof;
And mid dry leaves green dead-man's-hand
Groped toward that chapel in Mosby-land.
They leave the road and take the wood,
And mark the trace of ridges there—
A wood where once had slept the farm—
A wood where once tobacco grew
Drowsily in the hazy air,
And wrought in all kind things a calm—
Such influence, Mosby! bids disarm.
To ease even yet the place did woo—
To ease which pines unstirring share,
For ease the weary horses sighed:
Halting, and slackening girths, they feed,
Their pipes they light, they loiter there;
Then up, and urging still the Guide,
On, and after Mosby ride.
This Guide in frowzy coat of brown,
And beard of ancient growth and mould,
Bestrode a bony steed and strong,
As suited well with bulk he bore—
A wheezy man with depth of hold Who jouncing
went. A staff he swung—
A wight whom Mosby's wasp had stung.
Burnt out and homeless – hunted long!
That wheeze he caught in autumn-wood
Crouching (a fat man) for his life,
And spied his lean son 'mong the crew

That probed the covert. Ah! black blood
Was his 'gainst even child and wife—
Fast friends to Mosby. Such the strife.
A lad, unhorsed by sliding girths,
Strains hard to readjust his seat
Ere the main body show the gap
'Twi'x't them and the read-guard; scrub-oaks near
He sidelong eyes, while hands move fleet;
Then mounts and spurs. One drop his cap—
"Let Mosby fine!" nor heeds mishap.
A gable time-stained peeps through trees:
"You mind the fight in the haunted house?
That's it; we clenched them in the room—
An ambushade of ghosts, we thought,
But proved sly rebels on a bouse!
Luke lies in the yard." The chimneys loom:
Some muse on Mosby – some on doom.
Less nimbly now through brakes they wind,
And ford wild creeks where men have drowned;
They skirt the pool, a void the fen,
And so till night, when down they lie,
They steeds still saddled, in wooded ground:
Rein in hand they slumber then,
Dreaming of Mosby's cedarn den.
But Colonel and Major friendly sat
Where boughs deformed low made a seat.
The Young Man talked (all sworded and spurred)
Of the partisan's blade he longed to win,
And frays in which he meant to beat.
The grizzled Major smoked, and heard:
"But what's that – Mosby?" "No, a bird."
A contrast here like sire and son,
Hope and Experience sage did meet;
The Youth was brave, the Senior too;
But through the Seven Days one had served,
And gasped with the rear-guard in retreat:
So he smoked and smoked, and the wreath he
blew—
"Any sure news of Mosby's crew?"
He smoked and smoked, eying the while
A huge tree hydra-like in growth—Moon-tinged –
with crook'd boughs rent or lopped—
Itself a haggard forest. "Come"
The Colonel cried, "to talk you're loath;
D've hear? I say he must be stopped,
This Mosby – caged, and hair close cropped."
"Of course; but what's that dangling there"

"Where?" "From the tree – that gallows-bough;
"A bit of frayed bark, is it not"
"Ay – or a rope; did we hang last—?
Don't like my neckerchief any how"
He loosened it: "O ay, we'll stop
This Mosby – but that vile jerk and drop!"
By peep of light they feed and ride,
Gaining a grove's green edge at morn,
And mark the Aldie hills upread
And five gigantic horsemen carved
Clear-cut against the sky withdrawn;
Are more behind? an open snare?
Or Mosby's men but watchmen there?
The ravaged land was miles behind,
And Loudon spread her landscape rare;
Orchards in pleasant lowlands stood,
Cows were feeding, a cock loud crew,
But not a friend at need was there;
The valley-folk were only good
To Mosby and his wandering brood.
What best to do? what mean yon men?
Colonel and Guide their minds compare;
Be sure some looked their Leader through;
Dismounted, on his sword he leaned
As one who feigns an easy air;
And yet perplexed he was they knew—
Perplexed by Mosby's mountain-crew.
The Major hemmed as he would speak,
But checked himself, and left the ring
Of cavalymen about their Chief—
Young courtiers mute who paid their court
By looking with confidence on their king;
They knew him brave, foresaw no grief—
But Mosby – the time to think is brief.
The Surgeon (sashed in sacred green)
Was glad 'twas not for him to say
What next should be; if a trooper bleeds,
Why he will do his best, as wont,
And his partner in black will aid and pray;
But judgment bides with him who leads,
And Mosby many a problem breeds.
The Surgeon was the kindest man
That ever a callous trace professed;
He felt for him, that Leader young,
And offered medicine from his flask:
The Colonel took it with marvelous zest.
For such fine medicine good and strong,

Oft Mosby and his foresters long.
 A charm of proof. "Ho, Major, come—
 Pounce on yon men! Take half your troop,
 Through the thickets wind – pray speedy be—
 And gain their read. And, Captain Morn,
 Picket these roads – all travelers stop;
 The rest to the edge of this crest with me,
 That Mosby and his scouts may see."
 Commanded and done. Ere the sun stood steep,
 Back came the Blues, with a troop of Grays,
 Ten riding double – luckless ten—!
 Five horses gone, and looped hats lost,
 And love-locks dancing in a maze—
 Certes, but sophomores from the glen
 Of Mosby – not his veteran men.
 "Colonel," said the Major, touching his cap,
 "We've had our ride, and here they are"
 "Well done! how many found you there"
 "As many as I bring you here"
 "And no one hurt?" "There'll be no scar—
 One fool was battered." "Find their lair"
 "Why, Mosby's brood camp every where."
 He sighed, and slid down from his horse,
 And limping went to a spring-head nigh.
 "Why, bless me, Major, not hurt, I hope"
 "Battered my knee against a bar
 When the rush was made; all right by-and-by—
 Halloa! they gave you too much rope—
 Go back to Mosby, eh? elope?"
 Just by the low-hanging skirt of wood
 The guard, remiss, had given a chance
 For a sudden sally into the cover—
 But foiled the intent, nor fired a shot,
 Though the issue was a deadly trance;
 For, hurled 'gainst an oak that humped low over,
 Mosby's man fell, pale as a lover.
 They pulled some grass his head to ease
 (Lined with blue shreds a ground-nest stirred).
 The Surgeon came—"Here's a to-do"
 "Ah!" cried the Major, darting a glance,
 "This fellow's the one that fired and spurred Down
 hill, but met reserves below—
 My boys, not Mosby's – so we go!"
 The Surgeon – bluff, red, goodly man—
 Kneeled by the hurt one; like a bee
 He toiled. the pale young Chaplain too—
 (Who went to the wars for cure of souls,

And his own student-ailments) – he
 Bent over likewise; spite the two,
 Mosby's poor man more pallid grew.
 Meanwhile the mounted captives near
 Jested; and yet they anxious showed;
 Virginians; some of family-pride,
 And young, and full of fire, and fine
 In open feature and cheek that glowed;
 And here thrall'd vagabonds now they ride—
 But list! one speaks for Mosby's side.
 "Why, three to one – your horses strong—
 Revolvers, rifles, and a surprise—
 Surrender we account no shame!
 We live, are gay, and life is hope;
 We'll fight again when fight is wise.
 There are plenty more from where we came;
 But go find Mosby – start the game!"
 Yet one there was who looked but glum;
 In middle-age, a father he,
 And this his first experience too:
 "They shot at my heart when my hands were up—
 This fighting's crazy work, I see"
 But noon is high; what next do?
 The woods are mute, and Mosby is the foe.
 Save what we've got," the Major said;
 "Bad plan to make a scout too long;
 The tide may turn, and drag them back,
 And more beside. These rides I've been,
 And every time a mine was sprung.
 To rescue, mind, they won't be slack—
 Look out for Mosby's rifle-crack."
 "We'll welcome it! give crack for crack!
 Peril, old lad, is what I seek"
 "O then, there's plenty to be had—
 By all means on, and have our fill"
 With that, grotesque, he writhed his neck,
 Showing a scar by buck-shot made—
 Kind Mosby's Christmas gift, he said.
 "But, Colonel, my prisoners – let a guard
 Make sure of them, and lead to camp.
 That done, we're free for a dark-room fight
 If so you say." The other laughed;
 "Trust me, Major, nor throw a damp.
 But first to try a little sleight—
 Sure news of Mosby would suit me quite."
 Herewith he turned—"Reb, have a dram"
 Holding the Surgeon's flask with a smile

To a young scapegrace from the glen.
 "O yes!" he eagerly replied,
 "And thank you, Colonel, but – any guile?
 For if you think we'll blab – why, then
 You don't know Mosby or his men."
 The Leader's genial air relaxed.
 "Best give it up," a whisperer said.
 "By heaven, I'll range their rebel den"
 "They'll treat you well," the captive cried;
 "They're all like us – handsome – well bred:
 In wood or town, with sword or pen,
 Polite is Mosby, bland his men."
 "Where were you, lads, last night—?come, tell"
 "We—?at a wedding in the Vale—
 The bridegroom our comrade; by his side
 Belisent, my cousin – O, so proud
 Of her young love with old wounds pale—
 A Virginian girl! God bless her pride—
 Of a crippled Mosby-man the bride!"
 "Four wall shall mend that saucy mood,
 And moping prisons tame him down"
 Said Captain Cloud. "God help that day"
 Cried Captain Morn, "and he so young.
 But hark, he sings – a madcap one"
 "O we multiply merrily in the May,
 The birds and Mosby's men, they say!"
 While echoes ran, a wagon old,
 Under stout guard of Corporal Chew
 Came up; a lame horse, dingy white,
 With clouted harness; ropes in hand,
 Cringed the humped driver, black in hue;
 By him (for Mosby's band a sight)
 A sister-rebel sat, her veil held tight.
 "I picked them up," the Corporal said,
 "Crunching their way over stick and root,
 Through yonder wood. The man here – Cuff—
 Says they are going to Leesburg town"
 The Colonel's eye took in the group;
 The veiled one's hand he spied – enough!
 Not Mosby's. Spite the gown's poor stuff,
 Off went his hat: "Lady, fear not; We soldiers do
 what we deplore—
 I must detain you till we march"
 The stranger nodded. Nettled now,
 He grew politer than before—:
 "'Tis Mosby's fault, this halt and search"
 The lady stiffened in her starch.

"My duty, madam, bids me now
 Ask what may seem a little rude.
 Pardon – that veil – withdraw it, please
 (Corporal! make every man fall back);
 Pray, now I do but what I should;
 Bethink you, 'tis in masks like these
 That Mosby haunts the villages."
 Slowly the stranger drew her veil,
 And looked the Soldier in the eye—
 A glance of mingled foul and fair;
 Sad patience in a proud disdain,
 And more than quietude. A sigh
 She heaved, and if all unaware,
 And far seemed Mosby from her care.
 She came from Yewton Place, her home,
 So ravaged by the war's wild play—
 Campings, and foragings, and fires—
 That now she sought an aunt's abode.
 Her Kinsmen? In Lee's army, they.
 The black? A servant, late her sire's.
 And Mosby? Vainly he inquires.
 He gazed, and sad she met his eye;
 "In the wood yonder were you lost"
 No; at the forks they left the road
 Because of hoof-prints (thick they were—
 Thick as the words in notes thrice crossed),
 And fearful, made that episode.
 In fear of Mosby? None she showed.
 Her poor attire again he scanned:
 "Lady, once more; I grieve to jar
 On all sweet usage, but must plead
 To have what peeps there from your dress;
 That letter—'tis justly prize of war"
 She started – gave it – she must need.
 "'Tis not from Mosby? May I read?"
 And straight such matter he perused
 That with the Guide he went apart.
 The Hospital Steward's turn began:
 "Must squeeze this darkey; every tap
 Of knowledge we are bound to start"
 "Garry," she said, "tell all you can
 Of Colonel Mosby – that brave man."
 "Dun know much, sare; and missis here
 Know less dan me. But dis I know—"
 "Well, what?" "I dun know what I know"
 "A knowing answer!" The hump-back coughed,
 Rubbing his yellowish wool like tow.

"Come – Mosby – tell!" "O dun look so!
 My gal nursed missis – let we go."
 "Go where?" demanded Captain Cloud;
 "Back into bondage? Man, you're free"
 "Well, let we free!" The Captain's brow
 Lowered; the Colonel came – had heard:
 "Pooh! pooh! his simple heart I see—
 A faithful servant—Lady" (a bow),
 "Mosby's abroad – with us you'll go.
 "Guard! look to your prisoners; back to camp!
 The man in the grass – can he mount and away?
 Why, how he groans!" "Bad inward bruise—
 Might lug him along in the ambulance"
 "Coals to Newcastle! let him stay.
 Boots and saddles—!our pains we lose,
 Nor care I if Mosby hear the news!"
 But word was sent to a house at hand,
 And a flask was left by the hurt one's side.
 They seized in that same house a man,
 Neutral by day, by night a foe—
 So charged his neighbor late, the Guide.
 A grudge? Hate will do what it can;
 Along he went for a Mosby-man.
 No secrets now; the bugle calls;
 The open road they take, nor shun
 The hill; retrace the weary way.
 But one there was who whispered low,
 "This is a feint – we'll back anon;
 Young Hair-Brains don't retreat, they say;
 A brush with Mosby is the play!"
 They rode till eve. Then on a farm
 That lay along a hill-side green,
 Bivouacked. Fires were made, and then
 Coffee was boiled; a cow was coaxed
 And killed, and savory roasts were seen;
 And under the lee of a cattle-pen
 The guard supped freely with Mosby's men.
 The ball was bandied to and fro;
 Hits were given and hits were met;
 "Chickamauga, Feds – take off your hat"
 "But the Fight in the Clouds repaid you,
 Rebs""Forgotten about Manassas yet"
 Chatting and chaffing, and tit for tat,
 Mosby's clan with the troopers sat.
 "Here comes the moon!" a captive cried;
 "A song! what say? Archy, my lad"
 Hailing are still one of the clan

(A boyish face with girlish hair),
 "Give us that thing poor Pansy made
 Last Year." He brightened, and began;
 And this was the song of Mosby's man:
 Spring is come; she shows her pass—
 Wild violets cool!
 South of woods a small close grass—
 A vernal wool!
 Leaves are a'bud on the sassafras—
 They'll soon be full;
 Blessings on the friendly screen—
 I'm for the South! says the leafage green.
 Robins! fly, and take your fill
 Of out-of-doors—
 Garden, orchard, meadow, hill,
 Barns and bowers;
 Take your fill, and have your will—
 Virginia's yours!
 But, bluebirds! keep away, and fear
 The ambushade in bushes here.
 "A green song that," a seargeant said;
 "But where's poor Pansy? gone, I fear"
 "Ay, mustered out at Ashby's Gap"
 "I see; now for a live man's song;
 Ditty for ditty – prepare to cheer.
 My bluebirds, you can fling a cap!
 You barehead Mosby-boys – why – clap!"
 Nine Blue-coats went a-nutting
 Slyly in Tennessee—
 Not for chestnuts – better than that—
 Hugh, you bumble-bee!
 Nutting, nutting—
 All through the year there's nutting!
 A tree they spied so yellow,
 Rustling in motion queer;
 In they fired, and down they dropped—
 Butternuts, my dear!
 Nutting, nutting—
 Who'll 'list to go a-nutting?
 Ah! why should good fellows foemen be?
 And who would dream that foes they were—Larking
 and singing so friendly then—
 A family likeness in every face.
 But Captain Cloud made sour demur:
 "Guard! keep your prisoners in the pen,
 And let none talk with Mosby's men."
 That captain was a valorous one

(No irony, but honest truth),
Yet down from his brain cold drops distilled,
Making stalactites in his heart—
A conscientious soul, forsooth;
And with a formal hate was filled
Of Mosby's band; and some he'd killed.
Meantime the lady rueful sat,
Watching the flicker of a fire
Were the Colonel played the outdoor host
In brave old hall of ancient Night.
But ever the dame grew shyer and shyer,
Seeming with private grief engrossed—
Grief far from Mosby, housed or lost.
The ruddy embers showed her pale.
The Soldier did his best devoir:
"Some coffee—?no—?cracker—?one"
Cared for her servant – sought to cheer:
"I know, I know – a cruel war!
But wait – even Mosby'll eat his bun;
The Old Hearth – back to it anon!"
But cordial words no balm could bring;
She sighed, and kept her inward chafe,
And seemed to hate the voice of glee—
Joyless and tearless. Soon he called
An escort: "See this lady safe
In yonder house—.Madam, you're free.
And now for Mosby—.Guide! with me."
("A night-ride, eh?") "Tighten your girths!
But, buglers! not a note from you.
Fling more rails on the fires – a blaze"
("Sergeant, a feint – I told you so—
Toward Aldie again. Bivouac, adieu!")
After the cheery flames they gaze,
Then back for Mosby through the maze.
The moon looked through the trees, and tipped
The scabbards with her elfin beam;
The Leader backward cast his glance,
Proud of the cavalcade that came—
A hundred horses, bay and cream:
"Major! look how the lads advance—
Mosby we'll have in the ambulance!"
"No doubt, no doubt—:was that a hare—?
First catch, then cook; and cook him brown"
"Trust me to catch," the other cried—
"The lady's letter—!a dance, man, dance
This night is given in Leesburg town"
"He'll be there too!" wheezed out the Guide;

"That Mosby loves a dance and ride!"
"The lady, ah—!the lady's letter—
A lady, then, is in the case"
Muttered the Major. "Ay, her aunt
Writes her to come by Friday eve
(To-night), for people of the place,
At Mosby's last fight jubilant,
A party give, though table-cheer be scant."
The Major hemmed. "Then this night-ride
We owe to her—?One lighted house
In a town else dark—.The moths, begar!
Are not quite yet all dead!" "How? how"
"A mute, meek mournful little mouse—!
Mosby has wiles which subtle are—
But woman's wiles in wiles of war!"
"Tut, Major! by what craft or guile—"
"Can't tell! but he'll be found in wait.
Softly we enter, say, the town—
Good! pickets post, and all so sure—
When – crack! the rifles from every gate,
The Gray-backs fire – dashes up and down—
Each alley unto Mosby known!"
"Now, Major, now – you take dark views
Of a moonlight night." "Well, well, we'll see"
And smoked as if each whiff were gain.
The other mused; then sudden asked,
"What would you do in grand decree"
I'd beat, if I could, Lee's armies – then
Send constables after Mosby's men."
"Ay! ay—!you're odd." The moon sailed up;
On through the shadowy land they went.
"Names must be made and printed be"
Hummed the blithe Colonel. "Doc, your flask!
Major, I drink to your good content.
My pipe is out – enough for me!
One's buttons shine – does Mosby see?
"But what comes here?" A man from the front
Reported a tree athwart the road.
"Go round it, then; no time to bide;
All right – go on! Were one to stay
For each distrust of a nervous mood, Long miles
we'd make in this our ride
Through Mosby-land—.Oh! with the Guide!"
Then sportful to the Surgeon turned:
"Green sashes hardly serve by night"
"Nor bullets nor bottles," the Major sighed,
"Against these moccasin-snakes – such foes

As seldom come to solid fight:
They kill and vanish; through grass they glide;
Devil take Mosby!—"his horse here shied.
"Hold! look – the tree, like a dragged balloon;
A globe of leaves – some trickery here;
My nag is right – best now be shy"
A movement was made, a hubbub and snarl;
Little was plain – they blindly steer.
The Pleiads, as from ambush sly,
Peep out – Mosby's men in the sky!
As restive they turn, how sore they feel,
And cross, and sleepy, and full of spleen,
And curse the war. "Fools, North and South"
Said one right out. "O for a bed!
O now to drop in this woodland green"
He drops as the syllables leave his mouth—
Mosby speaks from the undergrowth—
Speaks in a volley! out jets the flame!
Men fall from their saddles like plums from trees;
Horses take fright, reins tangle and bind;
"Steady – Dismount – form – and into the wood"
They go, but find what scarce can please:
Their steeds have been tied in the field behind,
And Mosby's men are off like the wind.
Sound the recall! vain to pursue—
The enemy scatters in wilds he knows,
To reunite in his own good time;
And, to follow, they need divide—
To come lone and lost on crouching foes:
Maple and hemlock, beech and lime,
Are Mosby's confederates, share the crime.
"Major," burst in a bugler small,
"The fellow we left in Loudon grass—
Sir slyboots with the inward bruise,
His voice I heard – the very same—
Some watchword in the ambush pass;
Ay, sir, we had him in his shoes—
We caught him – Mosby – but to lose!"
"Go, go—!these saddle-dreamers! Well,
And here's another—.Cool, sir, cool"
"Major, I saw them mount and sweep, And one was
humped, or I mistake,
And in the skurry dropped his wool"
"A wig! go fetch it—:the lads need sleep;
They'll next see Mosby in a sheep!
"Come, come, fall back! reform yours ranks—
All's jackstraws here! Where's Captain Morn—?"

We've parted like boats in a raging tide!
But stay-the Colonel – did he charge?
And comes he there? 'Tis streak of dawn;
Mosby is off, the woods are wide—
Hist! there's a groan – this crazy ride!"
As they searched for the fallen, the dawn grew chill;
They lay in the dew: "Ah! hurt much, Mink?
And – yes – the Colonel!" Dead! but so calm
That death seemed nothing – even death,
The thing we deem every thing heart can think;
Amid wilding roses that shed their balm,
Careless of Mosby he lay – in a charm!
The Major took him by the Hand—
Into the friendly clasp it bled
(A ball through heart and hand he rued):
"Good-by" and gazed with humid glance;
Then in a hollow reverie said
"The weakness thing is lustihood;
But Mosby—"and he checked his mood.
"Where's the advance—?cut off, by heaven!
Come, Surgeon, how with your wounded there"
"The ambulance will carry all"
"Well, get them in; we go to camp.
Seven prisoners gone? for the rest have care"
Then to himself, "This grief is gall;
That Mosby—!I'll cast a silver ball!"
"Ho!" turning—"Captain Cloud, you mind
The place where the escort went – so shady?
Go search every closet low and high,
And barn, and bin, and hidden bower—
Every covert – find that lady!
And yet I may misjudge her – ay,
Women (like Mosby) mystify.
"We'll see. Ay, Captain, go – with speed!
Surround and search; each living thing
Secure; that done, await us where
We last turned off. Stay! fire the cage
If the birds be flown." By the cross-road spring
The bands rejoined; no words; the glare
Told all. Had Mosby plotted there?
The weary troop that wended now—Hardly it
seemed the same that pricked
Forth to the forest from the camp:
Foot-sore horses, jaded men;
Every backbone felt as nicked,
Each eye dim as a sick-room lamp,
All faces stamped with Mosby's stamp.

In order due the Major rode—
Chaplain and Surgeon on either hand;
A riderless horse a negro led;
In a wagon the blanketed sleeper went;
Then the ambulance with the bleeding band;
And, an emptied oat-bag on each head,
Went Mosby's men, and marked the dead.
What gloomed them? what so cast them down,
And changed the cheer that late they took,
As double-guarded now they rode
Between the files of moody men?
Some sudden consciousness they brook,
Or dread the sequel. That night's blood
Disturbed even Mosby's brotherhood.
The flagging horses stumbled at roots,
Floundered in mires, or clinked the stones;
No rider spake except aside;
But the wounded cramped in the ambulance,
It was horror to hear their groans—
Jerked along in the woodland ride,
While Mosby's clan their revery hide.
The Hospital Steward – even he—
Who on the sleeper kept his glance, Was changed;
late bright-black beard and eye
Looked now hearse-black; his heavy heart,

Like his fagged mare, no more could dance;
His grape was now a raisin dry:
'Tis Mosby's homily – Man must die.
The amber sunset flushed the camp
As on the hill their eyes they fed;
The pickets dumb looks at the wagon dart;
A handkerchief waves from the bannered tent—
As white, alas! the face of the dead:
Who shall the withering news impart?
The bullet of Mosby goes through heart to heart!
They buried him where the lone ones lie
(Lone sentries shot on midnight post)—
A green-wood grave-yard hid from ken,
Where sweet-fern flings an odor nigh—
Yet held in fear for the gleaming ghost!
Though the bride should see threescore and ten,
She will dream of Mosby and his men.
Now halt the verse, and turn aside—
The cypress falls athwart the way;
No joy remains for bard to sing;
And heaviest dole of all is this,
That other hearts shall be as gay
As hers that now no more shall spring:
To Mosby-land the dirges cling.