

# “Absent!”<sup>1</sup>

By Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

You do not lift your eyes to watch  
Us pass the conscious door;  
Your startled ear perceiveth not  
Our footfall on the floor;  
No eager word your lips betray  
To greet us when we stand;  
We throng to meet you, but you hold  
To us no beckoning hand.

Faint as the years in which we breathed,  
Far as the death we died,  
Dim as the faded battle-smoke,  
We wander at your side;  
Cold as a cause outlived, or lost,  
Vague as the legends told  
At twilight, of a mystic band  
Circling an Age of Gold.

Unseen, unheard, unfelt—and yet,  
Beneath the army blue  
Our heart-beats sounded real enough  
When we were boys like you.  
We turned us from your fabled lore,  
With ancient passion rife;  
No myth, our solemn laying down  
Of love, and hope, and life.

No myth, the clasped and severed hands,  
No dream, the last replies.  
Upon the desolated home  
To-day, the sunlight lies.  
Take, sons of peace, your heritage—  
Our loss, your legacy;  
Our action be your fables fair,  
Our facts, your poetry.

O ye who fall on calmer times!  
The perils of the calm  
Are yours—the swell, the sloth, the sleep,

---

<sup>1</sup> Written for the Centennial Celebration at Andover Phillips Academy.

The carelessness of harm,  
The keel that rides the gale, to strike  
Where the warm waves are still  
Ours were the surf, the stir, the shock,  
The tempest and the thrill.

Comrades, be yours that vigor old,  
Be yours the elected power  
That fits a man, like rock to tide,  
To his appointed hour;  
Yours to become all that we were,  
And all we might have been;  
Yours the fine eye that separates  
The unseen from the seen.