

The Unseen Comrades¹

By Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

Last night I saw an armed band, whose feet
Did take the martial step, although they trod
Soundless as waves of light upon the air.
(Silent from silent lips the bugle fell.)
The wind was wild; but the great flag they bore,
Hung motionless, and glittered like a god
Above their awful faces while they marched.
And when I saw, I understood and said —
“If these are they whom we did love, and give,
What seek they?” But one sternly answered me,—
“We seek our comrades whom we left to thee:
The weak, who were thy strength; the poor, who had
Thy pride; the faint and few who gave to thee
One supreme hour from out the day of life,
One deed majestic to their century.
These were thy trust: how fare they at thy hands?
Thy saviors then—are they thy heroes now?
Our comrades still; we keep the step with them,
*Behold! As thou unto the least of them
Shalt do, so dost thou unto us. Amen.*”

¹ Written for the benefit of the Soldiers' Home at Chelsea, Massachusetts.