

ROBERT GOULD SHAW

Brave, good, and true,
I see him stand before me now,
And read again on that young brow,
Where every hope was new,
HOW SWEET WERE LIFE!
Yet, by the mouth firm-set,
And look made up for Duty's utmost debt,
I could divine he knew
That death within the sulphurous hostile lines,
In the mere wreck of nobly-pitched designs,
Plucks hearts-ease, and not rue.

Right in the van,
On the red ramparts slippery swell,
With heart that beat a charge, he fell,
Foeward, as fits a man;
But the high soul burns on to light men's feet
Where death for noble ends makes dying sweet;
His life her crescent's span
Orbs full with share in their undarkening days
Who ever climbed the battailous steeps of praise
Since valor's praise began.

We bide our chance,
Unhappy, and make terms with Fate
A little more to let us wait;
He leads for aye the advance,
Hope's forlorn-hopes that plant the desperate good
For nobler Earths and days of manlier mood;
Our wall of circumstance
Cleared at a bound, he flashes o'er the fight,
A saintly shape of fame, to cheer the right
And steel each wavering glance.

I write of one,
While with dim eyes I think of three;
Who weeps not others fair and brave as he?
Ah, when the fight is won,
Dear Land, whom triflers now make bold to scorn
(Thee from whose forehead Earth awaits her morn),
How nobler shall the sun
Flame in thy sky, how braver breathe thy air,
That thou bred'st children who for thee could dare
And die as thine have done.

--Lowell.

ROBERT GOULD SHAW

Robert Gould Shaw was born in Boston on October 10, 1837, the son of Francis and Sarah Sturgis Shaw. When he was about nine years old, his parents moved to Staten Island, and he was educated there, and at school in the neighborhood of New York, until he went to Europe in 1853, where he remained traveling and studying for the next three years. He entered Harvard College in 1856, and left at the end of his third year, in order to accept an advantageous business offer in New York.

Even as a boy he took much interest in politics, and especially in the question of slavery. He voted for Lincoln in 1860, and at that time enlisted as a private in the New York 7th Regiment, feeling that there was likelihood of trouble, and that there would be a demand for soldiers to defend the country. His foresight was justified only too soon, and on April 19, 1861, he marched with his regiment to Washington. The call for the 7th Regiment was only for thirty days, and at the expiration of that service he applied for and obtained a commission as second lieutenant in the 2d Massachusetts, and left with that regiment for Virginia in July, 1861. He threw himself eagerly into his new duties, and soon gained a good position in the regiment. At Cedar Mountain he was an aid on General Gordon's staff, and was greatly exposed in the performance of his duties during the action. He was also with his regiment at Antietam, and was in the midst of the heavy fighting of that great battle.

Early in 1863, the Government determined to form negro regiments, and Governor Andrew offered Shaw, who had now risen to the rank of captain, the colonelcy of one to be raised in Massachusetts, the first black regiment recruited under State authority. It was a great compliment to receive this offer, but Shaw hesitated as to his capacity for such a responsible post. He first wrote a letter declining, on the ground that he did not feel that he had ability enough for the undertaking, and then changed his mind, and telegraphed Governor Andrew that he would accept. It is not easy to realize it now, but his action then in accepting this command required high moral courage, of a kind quite different from that which he had displayed already on the field of battle. The prejudice against the blacks was still strong even in the North. There was a great deal of feeling among certain classes against enlisting black regiments at all, and the officers who undertook to recruit and lead negroes were exposed to much attack and criticism. Shaw felt, however, that this very opposition made it all the more incumbent on him to undertake the duty. He wrote on February 8:

After I have undertaken this work, I shall feel that what I have to do is to prove that the negro can be made a good soldier. . . . I am inclined to think that the undertaking will not meet with so much opposition as was at first supposed. All sensible men in the army, of all parties, after a little thought, say that it is the best thing that can be done, and surely those at home who are not brave or patriotic enough to enlist should not ridicule or throw obstacles in the way of men who are going to fight for them. There is a great prejudice

against it, but now that it has become a government matter, that will probably wear away. At any rate I sha'n't be frightened out of it by its unpopularity. I feel convinced I shall never regret having taken this step, as far as I myself am concerned; for while I was undecided, I felt ashamed of myself as if I were cowardly.

Colonel Shaw went at once to Boston, after accepting his new duty, and began the work of raising and drilling the 54th Regiment. He met with great success, for he and his officers labored heart and soul, and the regiment repaid their efforts. On March 30, he wrote: "The mustering officer who was here to-day is a Virginian, and has always thought it was a great joke to try to make soldiers of 'niggers,' but he tells me now that he has never mustered in so fine a set of men, though about twenty thousand had passed through his hands since September." On May 28, Colonel Shaw left Boston, and his march through the city was a triumph. The appearance of his regiment made a profound impression, and was one of the events of the war which those who saw it never forgot.

The regiment was ordered to South Carolina, and when they were off Cape Hatteras, Colonel Shaw wrote:

The more I think of the passage of the 54th through Boston, the more wonderful it seems to me. just remember our own doubts and fears, and other people's sneering and pitying remarks when we began last winter, and then look at the perfect triumph of last Thursday. We have gone quietly along, forming the first regiment, and at last left Boston amidst greater enthusiasm than has been seen since the first three months' troops left for the war. Truly, I ought to be thankful for all my happiness and my success in life so far; and if the raising of colored troops prove such a benefit to the country and to the blacks as many people think it will, I shall thank God a thousand times that I was led to take my share in it.

He had, indeed, taken his share in striking one of the most fatal blows to the barbarism of slavery which had yet been struck. The formation of the black regiments did more for the emancipation of the negro and the recognition of his rights, than almost anything else. It was impossible, after that, to say that men who fought and gave their lives for the Union and for their own freedom were not entitled to be free. The acceptance of the command of a black regiment by such men as Shaw and his fellow-officers was the great act which made all this possible.

After reaching South Carolina, Colonel Shaw was with his regiment at Port Royal and on the islands of that coast for rather more than a month, and on July 18 he was offered the post of honor in an assault upon Fort Wagner, which was ordered for that night. He had proved that the negroes could be made into a good regiment, and now the second great opportunity had come, to prove their fighting quality. He wanted to demonstrate that his men could fight side by side with white soldiers, and show to somebody beside their officers what stuff they were made of. He, therefore, accepted the dangerous duty with gladness. Late in the day the troops were marched across Folly and Morris islands and

formed in line of battle within six hundred yards of Fort Wagner. At half-past seven the order for the charge was given, and the regiment advanced. When they were within a hundred yards of the fort, the rebel fire opened with such effect that the first battalion hesitated and wavered. Colonel Shaw sprang to the front, and waving his sword, shouted: "Forward, 54th!" With another cheer, the men rushed through the ditch, and gained a parapet on the right. Colonel Shaw was one of the first to scale the walls. As he stood erect, a noble figure, ordering his men forward and shouting to them to press on, he was shot dead and fell into the fort. After his fall, the assault was repulsed.

General Haywood, commanding the rebel forces, said to a Union prisoner: "I knew Colonel Shaw before the war, and then esteemed him. Had he been in command of white troops, I should have given him an honorable burial. As it is, I shall bury him in the common trench, with the negroes that fell with him." He little knew that he was giving the dead soldier the most honorable burial that man could have devised, for the savage words told unmistakably that Robert Shaw's work had not been in vain. The order to bury him with his "niggers," which ran through the North and remained fixed in our history, showed, in a flash of light, the hideous barbarism of a system which made such things and such feelings possible. It also showed that slavery was wounded to the death, and that the brutal phrase was the angry snarl of a dying tiger. Such words rank with the action of Charles Stuart, when he had the bones of Oliver Cromwell and Robert Blake torn from their graves and flung on dunghills or fixed on Temple Bar.

Robert Shaw fell in battle at the head of his men, giving his life to his country, as did many another gallant man during those four years of conflict. But he did something more than this. He faced prejudice and hostility in the North, and confronted the blind and savage rage of the South, in order to demonstrate to the world that the human beings who were held in bondage could vindicate their right to freedom by fighting and dying for it. He helped mightily in the great task of destroying human slavery, and in uplifting an oppressed and down-trodden race. He brought to this work the qualities which were particularly essential for his success. He had all that birth and wealth, breeding, education, and tradition could give. He offered up, in full measure, all those things which make life most worth living. He was handsome and beloved. He had a serene and beautiful nature, and was at once brave and simple. Above all things, he was fitted for the task which he performed and for the sacrifice which he made. The call of the country and of the time came to him, and he was ready. He has been singled out for remembrance from among many others of equal sacrifice, and a monument is rising to his memory in Boston, because it was his peculiar fortune to live and die for a great principle of humanity, and to stand forth as an ideal and beautiful figure in a struggle where the onward march of civilization was at stake. He lived in those few and crowded years a heroic life, and he met a heroic death. When he fell, sword in hand, on the parapet of Wagner, leading his black troops in a desperate assault, we can only say of him as Bunyan said of "Valiant for Truth": "And then he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side."