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Creation Date: ca. 1865
Description: Poem to commemorate bravery of the Irish Brigade during the Civil War.

Head Quarters of Thirty Second Maine Regiment

The Sprig of Green

By Joseph Bradford

At Fredericksburg on that dread day,
Ere yet the strife began,
Along the battle lines of blue
The General's order ran:
"Win we or lose, our country's curse
Upon the wretch that shirks,
But honor to the man who dies
The nearest to the works"

Before them rose the giant range
Of hills in martial sound;
From whence grim tops all bodefully,
The bristling cannon frowned,
No break [?] that iron line,
But death from left to right,
And Meagher, with his Irish, lay
Before St. Mary' Heights.

No gloom was there, but every face
So careless and so bright,
As if it was a wedding morn,
And not a day for fight,

And in their caps, tho' all around
No tree nor shrub was seen,
They wore, heaven knows from where procured
Each man a sprig of green.

Not long they waited for the sound
That told the strife began;
Hark! from the rivers further side!
It is the signal grim!
A thousand cannon from the hills
Bellow forth in fierce acclaim;
And all that mighty line of blue
Swept upward thro' the plain.

At what avail are words to paint
The strife that none can tell;
The hurrah of the Union host,
The wild Confederate yell,
The sabre's clank the horseman's tramp,
The scream of shot and shell,
The groans of dying men, that went
To make a mimic hell.

All day against those awful heights
Our lines were hurled in vain;
All day the shattered ranks closed up
But to be torn again;

And in their caps, tho' all around
No tree nor shrub was seen,
They wore, heaven knows from where procured
Each man a sprig of green

Not long they waited for the sound
That told the strife began;
Hark! from the rivers further side!
It is the signal grim!
A thousand cannon from the hills
Bellow forth in fierce acclaim;
And all that mighty line of blue
Swept upward through the plain.

At what avail are words to paint
The strife that none can tell;
The hurrah of the Union last host-
The wild Confederate yell,
The sabre's clank the horseman's tramp,
The scream of shot and shell,
The groans of dying men, that went
To make a mimic [?] hell

All day against those awful heights
Our lines were hurled in vain;
All day the tattered ranks closed up
But to be torn again;

Until the sun withdrew his light,
As if for very shame,
And night came down upon the field,
To end the bloody game.

The morning broke all fair and bright
Upon the dread array,
And lovingly, on hill and plain,
The blessed sunbeams lay,
The fight was done, the field was won,
The blue had lost the day;
And from their works, all curiously,
Swarmed down the men in gray.

Thick lay the slain, like sheaves of grain
Ripened by battle's suns,
But one good deed banded the rest,
A stone's throw from their guns.
They raised him softly for the brave
Respect the brave, I've seen —
And in his cap unwithered still,
They found a sprig of green.

Of all the thousands lying round
Close locked in death's embrace
What one, tho' all were brave and true,
From death had got such grace?

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Ripened by the battle's suns,
But one had died beyond the rest,
A stone's throw from their guns.
They raised him softly for the brave
Respect the brave, I've seen [?]
And in his cap unwithered still,
They found a sprig of green.

Of all the thousands lying round
Close locked in death's embrace
What one, tho' all were brave and true,
From death had got such grace.

No bearded soldier, old in wars,
Had won the happy place;
But he who died nearest to the works
Bore a comely boyish face.

They buried him just where he fell,
Those foemen, with rude art;
They said that he had earned his place
By his undaunted heart;
And one, - a poet in his soul -
Tho' rough in garb and mien,
Planted upon the simple mound,
The dead boy's sprig of green.

The brave man dies; but the brave deed
With death will not be found;
The travelers say, that to this day
The little children playing round
Can point the stranger to the spot,
The fairest of the scene,
The grave where sleeps the Irish lad
Who wore the sprig of green.

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