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The Twentieth Maine Regiment at Gettysburg

On the first, second, and third, the trident
Of the blood's Poseidon sank deeper, afresh
To the sea of its origin, and when, godsent,
It became the standard in Lincoln's flesh,
It sank again more firmly, for sallow troops
Prayed as penitents, wielding sleeve and mesh
Of arms, with bayonets, frantically in loops
Of mind, arresting and recovering to hold
A yard of rock or ground where the will droops
Only into mire and lesion.

A blade will mold

In time, if kept there, wet in misting sun:
The fragrant hill below, where peaches fall,
The lisp of leaves, the broken lines that run
Into ditches, the weaving and irrupting pall
Of smoke, the riband near a rose, the trickle
Of dew, the twinge of thorn, and the dying call
Of a horn. There the dull gray robe and sickle
Prevail as the finger feels a fragile spear
Of bone. Who were they of the bronze and nickel
Medals who received canister and shot at the angle,
Devoid of power that flamed the face? They railed
Into death, fumbling the flags of war that dangle
Now from stakes. Off white and dimly unassailed,
The monuments stand where the dying, once impaled
In weeds, flourish into the air of another century
As yield of newer orders and in Christ are nailed
Into lengths of rhetoric that seem less than fury,
Less than insurgency, and less than incidental worry.

—Clinton F. Larson