

# The Death of Brock.

## A Canadian Legend Addressed to the School Boys of Canada.

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### Scene.—Queenston Heights.

Outlook.—From the village of Queenston to the south—with Lewiston Heights on the left. The river Niagara rolling down on the left front, and the Queenston Heights, surmounted by Brock's monument, on the right front and right.

*Carminis personae.*—Gaffer Seward, (1) an ancient militiaman of 1812, and his great-grandson Isaac Brock.

### Gaffer Seward, *log*.

Come hither little son of mine, come hither Isaac Brock.  
You ask me to repeat the tale of that fierce battle shock;  
Wherein your noble namesake fell on yonder mountain side,  
Who gave his life for Canada, and having saved it, died;  
Ah! well do I remember through the mist of sixty years,  
That morning in October, so full of hopes and fears,  
When manfully, yet nervously, the invading foe we met,  
And those who lived our prisoners were before the sun had set.  
We knew that they were coming, as they never ceased to boast,  
And we saw their swarming thousands crowd along the opposite coast;  
We were but as a handful (2)—and we knew not where or when  
The blow might fall—but when it came why we were there and then.

We were on outpost duty—headquarters in our rear,  
At Fort St. George, six miles below, but we knew that Brock was there;  
Of course we lay upon our arms—that morn' ere dawn had broke—  
The hum and tramp of mustering men the coming blow bespoke,  
We heard them through the misty screen which shrouded shore from shore,  
And the tolling in the rowlock of the fast approaching oar;  
Each man was up in no time—at his post with silent tread—  
"Fix bayonets"—"handle cartridges," was all the Captain said;  
When from the point below us here (3) our eighteen pounder spoke,  
And the silence of the misty screen with startling nearness broke;  
A wild shriek—louder curses—the hoarse word of command,  
Up rose the mist—and a fleet of boats lay headed for the strand.

Then blazed Brown Bess with right good will both round and grape we piled—  
Yet on they came through shot and flame—they would not be denied;  
Those gallant Yankee regulars, right well their duty sped,  
And their leaders did their duty too, for gallantly they led,  
And as they landed, as they formed, we fell back from the shore  
To occupy the houses, as it was fixt (4) afore—  
They got it hot from shell and shot, but their leaders cheered them on,  
"For the honor of America," and the landing place was won.

The man who minds his order with a loop-hole to defend,  
Has but to hit his cartridge and blaze on with-out end;

(1) Gaffer—a word not familiar to the Canadian vocabulary, but good old Anglo-Saxon, being a term of respect applied to an aged man at present obsolete. See Worcester.

(2) "A whole fore at General Brock's disposal to cover a frontier of 38 miles did not amount to more than 1,200 men, including militia. The American General, Van Rensselaer, to guard about the same distance on the other side had 6,000. Thus the British force scattered along the line was exposed to be cut off in detail, the defect of the position at Queenston was its distance for support—but this was unavoidable and only to be met by sagacity, force, light, and activity, which Isaac Brock eminently possessed.

(3) Fromont's Point.—The gun at this point, the service of which had great effect on the events of the day, was commanded and directed by a Quebec lad—John Sewell—a son of the well known Chief Justice Sewell, U.E.L., he was then in the 49th Infantry. He died two years since at Quebec at an advanced age, having been commandant of Quebec up to a short time before his death.

(4) Gaffer Seward, in telling his unsophisticated tale, must be excused if now and then he lapses into the vernacular.

Amid the smoke he nothing sees, and knows but little more,  
But this I heard that while we fought fresh hundreds basted o'er.  
While thrice increased our numbers waned for death had marked our track,  
And then our ammunition failed, yet not a man gave back;  
Brave Dennis (5) with his "forty-ninth," and our unflinching few,  
Soon found, that just to hold our own, was as much as we could do—  
While a throng of Yankee Riflemen with many a taunt and jeer  
Swarmed round our flank scaled yonder heights and got into our rear.

We had bare time to look around, or to know the risk we ran,  
When a shout arose, a joyous cheer, which rushed from man to man—  
"Yes there he comes our general," just when we want him most,  
At the full speed of his charger: that one man was a host;  
His ringing voice, his flashing eye, he look and free,  
'Twas like God's Providence to men so sore beset as we.

Few words sufficed and little time to marshal our array,  
Our hearts were in our finger-ends we sprang up to obey;  
"We must carry yonder battery lads and clear these fellows out,"  
(You may see from hence the earthenwork which covered the redoubt.)  
It swarmed with ready riflemen, all desperate to kill,  
He drew his sword and led us first right up that rocky hill;  
How it befell I cannot tell, but we took it at a run,  
We stormed in o'er the breastwork and we captured back the gun,  
And we drove them up and on beyond yon crest which you well know,  
With the precipice behind them and Niagara below;  
Just then amidst the Americans up rose a flag of white, (6)  
But brave Wool sternly tore it down and still maintained the fight—  
While we had paused all breathless and somewhat disarranged,  
When Wool rang out his rallying shout and a desperate onslaught made.

The tide had turned—a wave of men came pouring on her crest,  
And forced us down by weight of fire—although we did our best;  
We had to leave our captured gun—we spiked it as we past—  
And then I saw our noble chief—one short look and the last,  
He had rallied some few scores of men, and with his sword on high,  
Was leading bravely up the slope shouting his battle cry:  
"On, on my gallant forty-ninth, on brave York Volunteers,"  
When the fatal bullet struck him—his grand form disappeared (7)  
And the last words he spoke to those who were by him when he fell  
Were, "hide my death from comrades who have ever loved me well."  
I was there among the foremost and there I saw him lie

With his hand upon his sword hilt and his brave face to the sky,  
Just there in the hollow of the hill you can see hence where it stands,  
In a few days you sacred stone placed by a Prince's hand, (8)  
As he said, we did, around his corse his soldiers coat we wound,  
Then tenderly and reverently we bore him from the ground—

Yet little thought the sorrowing men who mourned his doleful plight,  
That the soldiers prayer had been heard in death that in death he had won the fight.

For mark when in the morning the hope for our came o'er,  
And dared the best and faced the worst like brave men to the fore;

(5) Captains Dennis and Williams commanded the detachment of the 49th Infantry at Queenston and did their work right well, both were wounded. In after years Dennis became Sir James Dennis, K.C.L., Lieut.-Colonel, 3rd Foot.

(6) "At this moment some of the officers put a white handkerchief on a bayonet to hoist as a flag with intention to surrender. Captain Wool inquired the object? It was answered that the party were nearly without ammunition, and that it was useless to sacrifice the lives of brave men. Captain Wool tore off the flag and ordered the officers to rally the men and bring them to the charge. The order was executed in some confusion."—Niles (Albany) Register, 1812.

(7) Brock was of a powerful and imposing stature, 6ft. 2 in., says Tupper's "Life of Brock."

(8) H. R. H. the Prince of Wales planted this stone, marking the spot where Brock fell, in October, 1829.

They left behind them thousands whoaped the "lion" tones—  
Yet hid beneath a calf-skin their recreant skins and bones; (9)  
They were crazy to be at us when they saw their fellows band,  
And gain at length the mountain top bravely from the strand,  
But when they saw our leader dead, in the way in which we fought,  
They looked askant and "kinder guessed that they hadn't oughter ought," (10)  
And there they stood appalled against such shame was never known—  
As if the spirit of the dead had turned them into stone.  
While their abandoned comrades—who were comrades—but in name  
Were left to meet the fate which very swiftly came. (11)

That fate befell them swiftly—for Sheaffe had gained the heights,  
From Newark to St. David's road—while we prolonged the fight,  
As rapidly maneuvered to take the "60 to park,"  
And here them in between our fire and the margin of the bank,  
Where bristling, crags and a sheer descent two hundred feet and more  
Impend above the toiling waves and the mad rivers roar.

We heard the advancing skirmishers and the wild Indian cry,  
And the crash of heavy volleys, and we knew the end was nigh  
Our orders were to hold our own, our own post to defend—  
In the low ground here we could only hear—but we knew how it must end  
Fresh men and well filled pouches must ever bear the sway,  
Over fasting men and unsupplied—who fought it out all day,  
And so it ended: soon there came a lull and then the word  
Passed down that General Wadsworth had given up his sword,  
Gibson at 10 to ten, Scott and Wool, and full nine hundred more  
Had homage paid to the silent shade of our Great Chief in his gore. (12)

Three days had passed, when in long array with silent step and slow,  
With arms reversed with muffled drum, and arms waving low,  
With all the honor men could give, who with temper, stern and high,  
Just glanced around and dared not look each other in the eye,  
Who cast their smothered feelings upon the soldiers bier,  
As they bore him to his resting place in the Western Cavalier;  
And when the guns of Fort St. George their last sad tribute sped,  
And the three parting volleys had echoed o'er the dead,  
Our foe at Fort Niagara—most nobly was it done—  
Lowered their flag to half mast and gave us gun for gun;  
And when the war was over a grateful people gave

(9) Do what we will our works bespeak us, "Imitatorum verum precus"—Gaffer Seward may have read Shakespeare, but whether or not he has followed him closely.

(10) Our esteemed friend Gaffer Seward has tripped somewhat out of the vernacular here, but he possibly may have been paying a subtle tribute to some of his old Lantag-ists in the State of New York.

(11) Despatch from General Van Rensselaer to Hon. William Eustis, Secretary of War, Washington, 14th October, 1812.—"By this time I perceived my troops were embarking slowly, I passed immediately over to accelerate their movements, but to my utter astonishment I found that at the very moment when complete victory was in our hands the ardour of the unengaged troops had entirely subsided. I rode on in all directions, urged the men by every consideration to pass over, but in vain."

(12) Sheaffe won the battle of Queenston Heights truly and practically, Brock had been dead some hours. He had maneuvered excellently well to place the enemy in a hopeless position, as given in the text, but in the judgment of posterity the victory was morally due to Brock, for had not the circumstances attendant on his act of self-immolation (for it was nothing else) daunted and scared the New York militia: they could have crossed the Niagara in thousands, have overwhelmed the handful of men in the village already commanded in the rear and uniting with the regulars on the Heights and their excellent officers, have encountered Sheaffe with all the advantages of ground and numbers on the recent to St. David's, when the issue would have been very different. See Massie's "Life of Scott," New York, 1846. The same argument, which shows that Sheaffe understood his work.