

"The Great Blue Tent"

Edith Wharton

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COME unto me, said the Flag,
Ye weary and sore opprest;
For I am no shot-riddled rag,
But a great blue tent of rest.

Ye heavy laden, come
On the aching feet of dread,
From ravaged town, from murdered home,
From your tortured and your dead.

All they that beat at my crimson bars
Shall enter without demur.
Though the round earth rock with the
wind of wars,
Not one of my folds shall stir.

See, here is warmth and sleep,
And a table largely spread.
I give garments to them that weep,
And for gravestones I give bread.

But what, through my inmost fold,
Is this cry on the winds of war?
Are you grown so old, are you grown so
cold,
O Flag that was once our star?

Where did you learn that bread is life,
And where that fire is warm
You, that took the van of a world-wide
strife,
As an eagle takes the storm?

Where did you learn that men are bred

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Where hucksters bargain and gorge;
And where that down makes a softer bed
Than the snows of Valley Forge?

Come up, come up to the stormy sky,
Where our fierce folds rattle and hum,
For Lexington taught us how to fly,
And we dance to Concord's drum.

O flags of freedom, said the Flag,
Brothers of wind and sky;
I too was once a tattered rag,
And I wake and shake at your cry.

I tug and tug at the anchoring place,
Where my drowsy folds are caught;
I strain to be off on the old fierce chase
Of the foe we have always fought.

O People I made, said the Flag,
And welded from sea to sea,
I am still the shot-riddled rag,
That shrieks to be free, to be free.

Oh, cut my silken ties
From the roof of the palace of peace;
Give back my stars to the skies,
My stripes to the storm-striped seas!

Or else, if you bid me yield,
Then down with my crimson bars,
And o'er all my azure field
Sow poppies instead of stars.