

Tardy George

By [George Henry Boker](#)

(1823-1890)

What are you waiting for, George, I pray?-
To scour your cross-belts with fresh pipe-clay?
To burnish your buttons, to brighten your guns;
Or wait you for May-day and warm Spring suns?
Are you blowing your fingers because they are cold,
Or catching your breath ere you take a hold?
Is the mud knee-deep in valley and gorge?
What are you waiting for, tardy George?

Want you a thousand more cannon made,
To add to the thousand now arrayed?
Want you more men, more money to pay?
Are not two millions enough per day?
Wait you for gold and credit to go,
Before we shall see your martial show;
Till Treasury Notes will not pay to forge?
What are you waiting for, tardy George?

Are you waiting for your hair to turn,
Your heart to soften, your bowels to yearn
A little more towards "our Southern friends,"
As at home and abroad they work their ends?
"Our Southern friends!" whom you hold so dear
That you do no harm and give no fear,
As you tenderly take them by the gorge?
What are you waiting for, tardy George?

Now that you've marshaled your whole command,
Planned what you would, and changed what you planned;
Practiced with shot and practiced with shell,
Know to a hair where every one fell,
Made signs by day and signals by night;
Was it all done to keep out of a fight?
Is the whole matter too heavy a charge?
What are you waiting for, tardy George?

Shall we have more speeches, more reviews?
Or are you waiting to hear the news;
To hold up your hands in mute surprise
When France and England shall "recognize"?
Are you too grand to fight traitors small?
Must we have a Nation to cope withal?

Well, hammer the anvil and blow the forge:
You'll soon have a dozen, tardy George!

Suppose for a moment, George, my friend-
Just for a moment- you condescend
To use the means that are in your hands,
The eager muskets, and guns, and brands;
Take one bold step on the Southern sod,
And leave the issue to watchful God!
For now the Nation raises its gorge,
Waiting and watching you, tardy George!

I should not much wonder, George, my boy,
If Stanton* get in his head a toy,
And some fine morning, ere you are out,
He send you all "to the right about"-
You and Jomini,** and all the crew
Who think that war is nothing to do
But drill, and cipher, and hammer, and forge-
What are you waiting for, tardy George?

*Edwin M. Stanton was Lincoln's Secretary of War beginning in January 1862.

** Antoine-Henry, Baron Jomini (1779 –1869), was a general in the French - and then later, in the Russian - service. He was known as a military theorist and strategist.
The Union Reader (1958), Richard B. Harwell, ed., pp. 97-99.