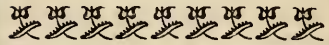


W. WHITMAN

MEMORIES OF
PRESIDENT
LINCOLN

Mdcccvi



WHITMAN, W.

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MEMORIES OF
PRESIDENT LINCOLN



*“ He knew to bide his time,
And can his fame abide,
Still patient in his simple faith sublime,
Till the wise years decide.
Great captains, with their guns and drums,
Disturb our judgment for the hour,
But at last silence comes ;
These all are gone, and, standing like a tower,
Our children shall behold his fame.
The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
New birth of our new soil, the first American.”*

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

MEMORIES OF PRESIDENT
LINCOLN AND OTHER
LYRICS OF THE WAR BY
WALT WHITMAN



PORTLAND MAINE
THOMAS B MOSHER
MDCCCCVI

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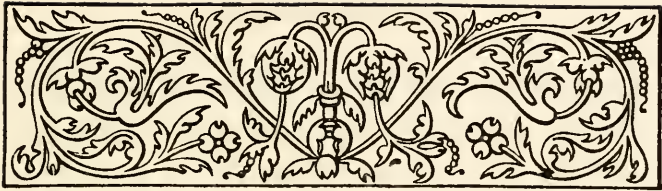
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FOREWORD



In early copies of the first edition that were put into cloth of Walt Whitman's / Drum-taps / New York, / 1865. / (12mo Pp. i-iv: 5-72,) the monody on Lincoln is not to be found. Later on, after the assassination, it appeared in the Sequel to Drum-taps: / (Since the preceding came from the press.) When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd, / and other pieces. / Washington / 1865-6. / (12mo Pp. 1-24.) The lyric "O Captain! My Captain!" is also in this Sequel, while "Hush'd be the Camps To-day" had already been included among the various poems that make up Drum-taps (Pp. 5-72). Last of all the quatrain, "This Dust was once the Man," was first printed in Leaves of Grass, / Washington, D. C. / 1871-2. / where the entire suite of four poems is entitled "President Lincoln's Burial Hymn." In Leaves of Grass / Boston / 1881-2 / this section is finally grouped as "Memories of President Lincoln." Henceforth no further changes are made either in the text or the order of the poems.



FOREWORD

WHITMAN did not subject Lincoln to the literary but to the human motive. Lincoln does not become a literary figure by his touch. Does not become a man in a book. After Whitman is done with him Lincoln still remains Lincoln. No way reduced. No way aggrandized. Only better understood. His background does not become a book. His background remains what it was. Remains life. Generic life. As life is where life finds life at the root. I may let Whitman put in a word for himself. Whitman said to me of Lincoln :

“Lincoln is particularly my man — particularly belongs to me ; yes ; and by the same token I am Lincoln’s man : I guess I particularly belong to him : we are afloat in the same stream — we are rooted in the same ground.”

To know the Lincoln of Whitman you want to know the Whitman of Whitman. Whitman

FOREWORD

was literary. But he was not first of all literary. Or last of all literary. First of all he was human. He was not the leaves of a book. He was the bone and flesh of a man. Yes, he was that something or other not bone or flesh which is also of a man — which finally is the man. Simply literary analysis can make little out of Whitman. He does not yield to the scalpel. He is not to be resurrected from an inkpot. His voice falls in with the prophet voices. He was not unlettered. He knew the alphabet. But he kept all alphabetical arrogance well in hand. The letter was kept in hand. The spirit was left free. You cannot buy a ticket for Athens or Weimar or Paris or London or Boston and reach Whitman. He is never reached in that circle. The literary centers do not lead to him. You have got to travel to him by another route. You go East and find the Buddhistic canticles. You consult the Zoroastrian avatars. And you take the word of Jesus for a great deal. And you may hit Socrates on the way. And you keep on with your journey, touching here and there in European history certain men, certain influences. Going into port now and then. Never going where men compete for literary judgment. Never

FOREWORD

where men set out to acquit themselves immortally as artists. Keeping forever close to the careless rhythms of original causes. So you go on. And go on. And by and by you arrive at Whitman. Not by way of the university. Not by way of Shakespeare. Not by way of the literary experts and adepts. But by human ways. To try to find Whitman by way of Shakespeare or Molière would be hopeless. I do not disparage the other routes to other men. I am only describing this route to Whitman. This route, which is the only route. Whitman chants and prays and soars. He is not pretty. He is only beautiful. He is not beautiful with the beauty of beauty. He is beautiful with the beauty of truth. The pen can easily miss Whitman. But the heart reaches him direct. Whitman is therefore the best route to Lincoln. The same process which provides Whitman for you provided Lincoln for Whitman. Whitman said to me again about Lincoln:

“There was no reason why Lincoln should not have been a prophet rather than a politician; he was in fact a divine prophet-politician; in him for almost the first time prophecy had something to say in politics. I shouldn’t wonder but that

FOREWORD

in another age of the world Lincoln would have been a chosen man to lead in some rebellion against ecclesiastical institutions and religious form and ceremony."

HORACE TRAUBEL.

We are not told that Lincoln ever read Leaves of Grass or as much as knew of its existence. Neither are we aware if Whitman ever had intimate personal speech with the liberator of three million souls in bondage. But we do know and rejoice that both men were in the world together, and near in heart and brain together, and that this greatest of all dirges, born of a nation's mourning for her dead, will remain an everlasting masterpiece when

*"The tumult of the time disconsolate
To inarticulate murmurs dies away,
While the eternal ages watch and wait."*

T. B. M.





MEMORIES OF
PRESIDENT LINCOLN



“The main effect of this poem is of strong, solemn, and varied music ; and it involves in its construction a principle after which perhaps the great composers most work, — namely, spiritual auricular analogy. At first it would seem to defy analysis, so rapt is it, and so indirect. No reference whatever is made to the mere fact of Lincoln’s death ; the poet does not even dwell upon its unprovoked atrocity, and only occasionally is the tone that of lamentation ; but, with the intuitions of the grand art, which is the most complex when it seems most simple, he seizes upon three beautiful facts of nature, which he weaves into a wreath for the dead President’s tomb. The central thought is of death, but around this he curiously twines, first, the early-blooming lilacs which the poet may have plucked the day the dark shadow came ; next the song of the hermit thrush, the most sweet and solemn of all our songsters, heard at twilight in the dusky cedars ; and with these the evening star, which, as many may remember, night after night in the early part of that eventful spring, hung low in the west with unusual and tender brightness. These are the premises whence he starts his solemn chant.

The attitude, therefore, is not that of being bowed down and weeping hopeless tears, but of singing a commemorative hymn, in which the voices of nature join, and fits that exalted condition of the soul which serious events and the presence of death induce.”

JOHN BURROUGHS.



I

WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOOR-
YARD BLOOM'D

1

WHEN lilacs last in the dooryard
bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd
in the western sky in the
night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-
returning spring.

Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you
bring,
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in
the west,
And thought of him I love.

2

O powerful western fallen star!
O shades of night — O moody, tearful night!

3

O great star disappear'd — O the black murk
that hides the star!
O cruel hands that hold me powerless — O
helpless soul of me!
O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my
soul.

3

In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near
the white-wash'd palings,
Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-
shaped leaves of rich green,
With many a pointed blossom rising delicate,
with the perfume strong I love,
With every leaf a miracle — and from this bush
in the dooryard,
With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped
leaves of rich green,
A sprig with its flower I break.

4

In the swamp in secluded recesses,
A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.

Solitary the thrush,
The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the
settlements,
Sings by himself a song.

Song of the bleeding throat,
Death's outlet song of life, (for well dear brother
I know,
If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st
surely die.)

5

Over the breast of the spring, the land, amid
cities,
Amid lanes and through old woods, where lately
the violets peep'd from the ground,
spotting the gray debris,
Amid the grass in the fields each side of the
lanes, passing the endless grass,
Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain
from its shroud in the dark-brown fields
uprisen,
Passing the apple-tree blows of white and pink
in the orchards,
Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest in the
grave,
Night and day journeys a coffin.

6

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
Through day and night with the great cloud
darkening the land,

With the pomp of the inloop'd flags with the
 cities draped in black,
With the show of the States themselves as of
 crape-veil'd women standing,
With processions long and winding and the
 flambeaus of the night,
With the countless torches lit, with the silent
 sea of faces and the unbared heads,
With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and
 the sombre faces,
With dirges through the night, with the thou-
 sand voices rising strong and solemn,
With all the mournful voices of the dirges
 pour'd around the coffin,
The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs
 — where amid these you journey,
With the tolling tolling bells' perpetual clang,
Here, coffin that slowly passes,
I give you my sprig of lilac.

7

(Nor for you, for one alone,
Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I
 bring,
For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant
 a song for you O sane and sacred death.

6

All over bouquets of roses,
O death, I cover you over with roses and early
lilies,
But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the
first,
Copious I break, I break the sprigs from the
bushes,
With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,
For you and the coffins all of you O death.)

8

O western orb sailing the heaven,
Now I know what you must have meant as a
month since I walk'd,
As I walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy
night,
As I saw you had something to tell as you bent
to me night after night,
As you droop'd from the sky low down as if to
my side, (while the other stars all look'd
on,)
As we wander'd together the solemn night, (for
something I know not what kept me
from sleep,)
As the night advanced, and I saw on the rim of
the west how full you were of woe,
As I stood on the rising ground in the breeze
in the cool transparent night,

As I watch'd where you pass'd and was lost in
the netherward black of the night,
As my soul in its trouble dissatisfied sank, as
where you sad orb,
Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone.

9

Sing on there in the swamp,
O singer bashful and tender, I hear your notes,
I hear your call,
I hear, I come presently, I understand you,
But a moment I linger, for the lustrous star has
detain'd me,
The star my departing comrade holds and detains
me.

10

O how shall I warble myself for the dead one
there I loved?
And how shall I deck my song for the large
sweet soul that has gone?
And what shall my perfume be for the grave of
him I love?

Sea-winds blown from east and west,
Blown from the Eastern sea and blown from the
Western sea, till there on the prairies
meeting,

These and with these and the breath of my
chant,
I'll perfume the grave of him I love.

11

O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?
And what shall the pictures be that I hang on
the walls,
To adorn the burial-house of him I love?

Pictures of growing spring and farms and homes,
With the Fourth-month eve at sundown, and
the gray smoke lucid and bright,
With floods of the yellow gold of the gorgeous,
indolent, sinking sun, burning, expand-
ing the air,
With the fresh sweet herbage under foot, and
the pale green leaves of the trees prolific,
In the distance the flowing glaze, the breast of
the river, with a wind-dapple here and
there,
With ranging hills on the banks, with many a
line against the sky, and shadows,
And the city at hand with dwellings so dense,
and stacks of chimneys,
And all the scenes of life and the workshops,
and the workmen homeward returning.

Lo, body and soul — this land,
 My own Manhattan with spires, and the spark-
 ling and hurrying tides, and the ships,
 The varied and ample land, the South and the
 North in the light, Ohio's shores and
 flashing Missouri,
 And ever the far-spreading prairies cover'd with
 grass and corn.

Lo, the most excellent sun so calm and haughty,
 The violet and purple morn with just-felt
 breezes,
 The gentle soft-born measureless light,
 The miracle spreading bathing all, the fulfill'd
 noon,
 The coming eve delicious, the welcome night
 and the stars,
 Over my cities shining all, enveloping man and
 land.

Sing on, sing on you gray-brown bird,
 Sing from the swamps, the recesses, pour your
 chant from the bushes,
 Limitless out of the dusk, out of the cedars and
 pines.

Sing on dearest brother, warble your reedy song,
Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe.

O liquid and free and tender !
O wild and loose to my soul — O wondrous
singer !
You only I hear — yet the star holds me, (but
will soon depart,)
Yet the lilac with mastering odor holds me.

14

Now while I sat in the day and look'd forth,
In the close of the day with its light and the
fields of spring, and the farmers prepar-
ing their crops,
In the large unconscious scenery of my land
with its lakes and forests,
In the heavenly aerial beauty, (after the per-
turb'd winds and the storms,)
Under the arching heavens of the afternoon
swift passing, and the voices of children
and women,
The many-moving sea-tides, and I saw the ships
how they sail'd,
And the summer approaching with richness,
and the fields all busy with labor,

And the infinite separate houses, how they all
went on, each with its meals and minutia
of daily usages,
And the streets how their throbbings throb'd,
and the cities pent — lo, then and there,
Falling upon them all and among them all,
enveloping me with the rest,
Appear'd the cloud, appear'd the long black
trail,
And I knew death, its thought, and the sacred
knowledge of death.

Then with the knowledge of death as walking
one side of me,
And the thought of death close-walking the
other side of me,
And I in the middle as with companions, and
as holding the hands of companions,
I fled forth to the hiding receiving night that
talks not,
Down to the shores of the water, the path by
the swamp in the dimness,
To the solemn shadowy cedars and ghostly
pines so still.

And the singer so shy to the rest receiv'd me,
The gray-brown bird I know receiv'd us com-
rades three,

And he sang the carol of death, and a verse for
him I love.

From deep secluded recesses,
From the fragrant cedars and the ghostly pines
so still,
Came the carol of the bird.

And the charm of the carol rapt me,
As I held as if by their hands my comrades in
the night,
And the voice of my spirit tallied the song of
the bird.

*Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving,
arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.*

*Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge
curious,
And for love, sweet love — but praise! praise!
praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding
death.*

*Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest
welcome ?*

*Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed
come, come unfalteringly.*

*Approach strong deliveress,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them I joy-
ously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death.*

*From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose saluting thee, adorn-
ments and feastings for thee,
And the sights of the open landscape and the
high-spread sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and
thoughtful night.*

*The night in silence under many a star,
The ocean shore and the husky whispering wave
whose voice I know,
And the soul turning to thee O vast and well-
veil'd death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.*

*Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,
Over the rising and sinking waves, over the
 myriad fields and the prairies wide,
Over the dense-pack'd cities all and the teeming
 wharves and ways,
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee O
 death.*

15

To the tally of my soul,
Loud and strong kept up the gray-brown bird,
With pure deliberate notes spreading filling the
 night.

Loud in the pines and cedars dim,
Clear in the freshness moist and the swamp-
 perfume,
And I with my comrades there in the night.

While my sight that was bound in my eyes
 unclosed,
As to long panoramas of visions.

And I saw askant the armies,
I saw as in noiseless dreams hundreds of battle-
 flags,
Borne through the smoke of the battles and
 pierc'd with missiles I saw them,

And carried hither and yon through the smoke,
and torn and bloody,
And at last but a few shreds left on the staffs,
(and all in silence,
And the staffs all splinter'd and broken.

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
And the white skeletons of young men, I saw
them,
I saw the debris and debris of all the slain sol-
diers of the war,
But I saw they were not as was thought,
They themselves were fully at rest, they suffer'd
not,
The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother
suffer'd,
And the wife and the child and the musing
comrade suffer'd,
And the armies that remain'd suffer'd.

16

Passing the visions, passing the night,
Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrades'
hands,
Passing the song of the hermit bird and the
tallying song of my soul,
Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying
ever-altering song,

As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising
and falling, flooding the night,
Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warn-
ing, and yet again bursting with joy,
Covering the earth and filling the spread of the
heaven,
As that powerful psalm in the night I heard
from recesses,
Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped
leaves,
I leave thee there in the door-yard, blooming,
returning with spring.

I cease from my song for thee,
From my gaze on thee in the west, fronting the
west, communing with thee,
O comrade lustrous with silver face in the night.

Yet each to keep and all, retrievements out of
the night,
The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-
brown bird,
And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd in my
soul,
With the lustrous and drooping star with the
countenance full of woe,
With the holders holding my hand nearing the
call of the bird,

Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their
memory ever to keep, for the dead I
loved so well,
For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and
lands—and this for his dear sake,
Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant
of my soul,
There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk
and dim.

II

O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

O CAPTAIN! my Captain! our fearful
trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we
sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all
exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel
grim and daring ;
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the
bells ;
Rise up — for you the flag is flung — for you
the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths — for
you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager
faces turning ;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale
and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse
nor will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage
closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with
object won ;
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

III

HUSH'D BE THE CAMPS TO-DAY

(*May 4, 1865*)

HUSH'D be the camps to-day,
And soldiers let us drape our war-worn
 weapons,
And each with musing soul retire to celebrate,
Our dear commander's death.

No more for him life's stormy conflicts,
Nor victory, nor defeat — no more time's dark
 events,
Charging like ceaseless clouds across the sky.

But sing poet in our name,
Sing of the love we bore him — because you,
 dweller in camps, know it truly.

As they invault the coffin there,
Sing — as they close the doors of earth upon
 him — one verse,
For the heavy hearts of soldiers.

IV

THIS DUST WAS ONCE THE MAN

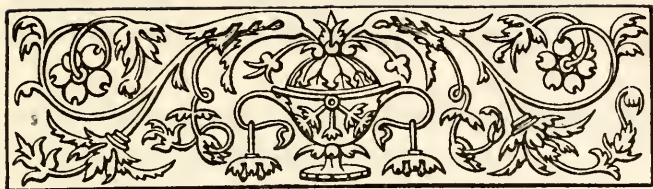
THIS dust was once the man,
Gentle, plain, just and resolute, under
whose cautious hand,
Against the foulest crime in history known in
any land or age,
Was saved the Union of these States.





LYRICS OF THE WAR





BEAT! BEAT! DRUMS!

BEAT! beat! drums!—blow!
bugles! blow!
Through the windows—through
doors—burst like a ruthless
force,
Into the solemn church, and scatter the con-
gregation,
Into the school where the scholar is studying;
Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness
must he have now with his bride,
Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing
his field or gathering his grain,
So fierce you whirr and pound you drums—so
shrill you bugles blow.

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!
Over the traffic of cities—over the rumble of
wheels in the streets;

Are beds prepared for sleepers at night in the
houses? no sleepers must sleep in those
beds,

No bargainers' bargains by day — no brokers
or speculators — would they continue?

Would the talkers be talking? would the singer
attempt to sing?

Would the lawyer rise in the court to state his
case before the judge?

Then rattle quicker, heavier drums — you
bugles wilder blow.

Beat! beat! drums! — blow! bugles! blow!
Make no parley — stop for no expostulation,
Mind not the timid — mind not the weeper or
prayer,

Mind not the old man beseeching the young
man,

Let not the child's voice be heard, nor the
mother's entreaties,

Make even the trestles to shake the dead where
they lie awaiting the hearses,

So strong you thump O terrible drums — so
loud you bugles blow.

COME UP FROM THE FIELDS
FATHER

COME up from the fields father, here's a
letter from our Pete,
And come to the front door mother, here's a
letter from thy dear son.

Lo, 'tis autumn,
Lo, where the trees, deeper green, yellower
and redder,
Cool and sweeten Ohio's villages with leaves
fluttering in the moderate wind,
Where apples ripe in the orchards hang and
grapes on the trellis'd vines,
(Smell you the smell of the grapes on the vines?
Smell you the buckwheat where the bees were
lately buzzing?)
Above all, lo, the sky so calm, so transparent
after the rain, and with wondrous clouds,
Below too, all calm, all vital and beautiful, and
the farm prospers well.

Down in the fields all prospers well,
But now from the fields come father, come at
the daughter's call,
And come to the entry mother, to the front
door come right away.

Fast as she can she hurries, something ominous,
her steps trembling,
She does not tarry to smooth her hair nor adjust
her cap.

Open the envelope quickly,
O this is not our son's writing, yet his name is
sign'd,
O a strange hand writes for our dear son, O
stricken mother's soul !
All swims before her eyes, flashes with black,
she catches the main words only,
Sentences broken, *gunshot wound in the breast,*
cavalry skirmish, taken to hospital,
At present low, but will soon be better.

Ah now the single figure to me,
Amid all teeming and wealthy Ohio with all
its cities and farms,
Sickly white in the face and dull in the head,
very faint,
By the jamb of a door leans.

*Grieve not so, dear mother, (the just-grown
daughter speaks through her sobs,
The little sisters huddle around speechless and
dismay'd,)*
*See, dearest mother, the letter says Pete will soon
be better.*

Alas poor boy, he will never be better, (nor
may-be needs to be better, that brave
and simple soul,)

While they stand at home at the door he is
dead already,

The only son is dead.

But the mother needs to be better,
She with thin form presently drest in black,
By day her meals untouch'd, then at night fit-
fully sleeping, often waking,

In the midnight waking, weeping, longing with
one deep longing,

O that she might withdraw unnoticed, silent
from life escape and withdraw,

To follow, to seek, to be with her dear dead son.

THE WOUND-DRESSER

1

AN old man bending I come among new
faces,
Years looking backward resuming in answer to
children,
Come tell us old man, as from young men and
maidens that love me,
(Arous'd and angry, I'd thought to beat the
alarum, and urge relentless war,
But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd
and I resign'd myself,
To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or
silently watch the dead ;)
Years hence of these scenes, of these furious
passions, these chances,
Of unsurpass'd heroes, (was one side so brave?
the other was equally brave ;)
Now be witness again, paint the mightiest
armies of earth,
Of those armies so rapid so wondrous what saw
you to tell us?
What stays with you latest and deepest? of
curious panics,
Of hard-fought engagements or sieges tremen-
dous what deepest remains ?

O maidens and young men I love and that love
 me,
 What you ask of my days those the strangest
 and sudden your talking recalls,
 Soldier alert I arrive after a long march cover'd
 with sweat and dust,
 In the nick of time I come, plunge in the fight,
 loudly shout in the rush of successful
 charge,
 Enter the captur'd works — yet lo, like a swift-
 running river they fade,
 Pass and are gone they fade — I dwell not on
 soldiers' perils or soldiers' joys,
 (Both I remember well — many the hardships,
 few the joys, yet I was content.)

But in silence, in dreams' projections,
 While the world of gain and appearance and
 mirth goes on,
 So soon what is over forgotten, and waves wash
 the imprints off the sand,
 With hinged knees returning I enter the doors,
 (while for you up there,
 Whoever you are, follow without noise and be
 of strong heart.)

Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,
Straight and swift to my wounded I go,
Where they lie on the ground after the battle
brought in,
Where their priceless blood reddens the grass
the ground,
Or to the rows of the hospital tent, or under
the roof'd hospital,
To the long rows of cots up and down each
side I return,
To each and all one after another I draw near,
not one do I miss,
An attendant follows holding a tray, he carries
a refuse pail,
Soon to be fill'd with clotted rags and blood,
emptied, and fill'd again.

I onward go, I stop,
With hinged knees and steady hand to dress
wounds,
I am firm with each, the pangs are sharp yet
unavoidable,
One turns to me his appealing eyes — poor boy !
I never knew you,
Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to
die for you, if that would save you.

On, on I go, (open doors of time! open hos-
pital doors!)

The crush'd head I dress, (poor crazed hand
tear not the bandage away,)

The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet
through and through I examine,

Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already
the eye, yet life struggles hard,

(Come sweet death! be persuaded O beautiful
death!

In mercy come quickly.)

From the stump of the arm, the amputated
hand,

I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash
off the matter and blood,

Back on his pillow the soldier bends with
curv'd neck and side-falling head,

His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares
not look on the bloody stump,

And has not yet look'd on it.

I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep,

But a day or two more, for see the frame all
wasted and sinking,

And the yellow-blue countenance see.

I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with
the bullet-wound,
Cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid
gangrene, so sickening, so offensive,
While the attendant stands behind aside me
holding the tray and pail.

I am faithful, I do not give out,
The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound in the
abdomen,
These and more I dress with impassive hand,
(yet deep in my breast a fire, a burning
flame.)

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Thus in silence in dreams' projections,
Returning, resuming, I thread my way through
the hospitals,
The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing
hand,
I sit by the restless all the dark night, some are
so young,
Some suffer so much, I recall the experience
sweet and sad,
(Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck
have cross'd and rested,
Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded
lips.)

SPIRIT WHOSE WORK IS DONE

(*Washington City, 1865*)

SPIRIT whose work is done — spirit of
dreadful hours!

Ere departing fade from my eyes your forests
of bayonets ;

Spirit of gloomiest fears and doubts, (yet onward
ever unfaltering pressing,)

Spirit of many a solemn day and many a savage
scene — electric spirit,

That with muttering voice through the war
now closed, like a tireless phantom flitted,
Rousing the land with breath of flame, while
you beat and beat the drum,

Now as the sound of the drum, hollow and
harsh to the last, reverberates round me,
As your ranks, your immortal ranks, return,
return from the battles,

As the muskets of the young men yet lean over
their shoulders,

As I look on the bayonets bristling over their
shoulders,

As those slanted bayonets, whole forests of them
appearing in the distance, approach and
pass on, returning homeward,

Moving with steady motion, swaying to and fro
to the right and left,

Evenly lightly rising and falling while the steps
keep time ;
Spirit of hours I knew, all hectic red one day,
but pale as death next day,
Touch my mouth ere you depart, press my lips
close,
Leave me your pulses of rage — bequeath them
to me — fill me with currents convul-
sive,
Let them scorch and blister out of my chants
when you are gone,
Let them identify you to the future in these
songs.

ASHES OF SOLDIERS

ASHES of soldiers South or North,
As I muse retrospective murmuring a
chant in thought,
The war resumes, again to my sense your shapes,
And again the advance of the armies.

Noiseless as mists and vapors,
From their graves in the trenches ascending,
From cemeteries all through Virginia and Ten-
nessee,
From every point of the compass out of the
countless graves,
In wafted clouds, in myriads large, or squads of
twos or threes or single ones they come,
And silently gather round me.

Now sound no note O trumpeters,
Not at the head of my cavalry parading on
spirited horses,
With sabres drawn and glistening, and carbines
by their thighs, (ah my brave horsemen!
My handsome tan-faced horsemen! what life,
what joy and pride,
With all the perils were yours.)

Nor you drummers, neither at reveillé at dawn,
Nor the long roll alarming the camp, nor even
the muffled beat for a burial,
Nothing from you this time O drummers bearing
my warlike drums.

But aside from these and the marts of wealth
and the crowded promenade,
Admitting around me comrades close unseen by
the rest and voiceless,
The slain elate and alive again, the dust and
debris alive,
I chant this chant of my silent soul in the name
of all dead soldiers.

Faces so pale with wondrous eyes, very dear,
gather closer yet,
Draw close, but speak not.

Phantoms of countless lost,
Invisible to the rest henceforth become my
companions,
Follow me ever—desert me not while I live.

Sweet are the blooming cheeks of the living—
sweet are the musical voices sounding,
But sweet, ah sweet, are the dead with their
silent eyes.

Dearest comrades, all is over and long gone,
But love is not over—and what love, O com-
rades!

Perfume from battle-fields rising, up from the
fœtor arising.

Perfume therefore my chant, O love, immortal
love,

Give me to bathe the memories of all dead sol-
diers,

Shroud them, embalm them, cover them all over
with tender pride.

Perfume all—make all wholesome,

Make these ashes to nourish and blossom,

O love, solve all, fructify all with the last chem-
istry.

Give me exhaustless, make me a fountain,

That I exhale love from me wherever I go like
a moist perennial dew,

For the ashes of all dead soldiers South or North.

PENSIVE ON HER DEAD GAZING

PENSIVE on her dead gazing I heard the
Mother of All,
Desperate on the torn bodies, on the forms cov-
ering the battle-fields gazing,
(As the last gun ceased, but the scent of the
powder-smoke linger'd,)
As she call'd to her earth with mournful voice
while she stalk'd,
Absorb them well O my earth, she cried, I
charge you lose not my sons, lose not
an atom,
And you streams absorb them well, taking their
dear blood,
And you local spots, and you airs that swim
above lightly impalpable,
And all you essences of soil and growth, and
you my rivers' depths,
And you mountain sides, and the woods where
my dear children's blood trickling red-
den'd,
And you trees down in your roots to bequeath
to all future trees,
My dead absorb or South or North—my young
men's bodies absorb, and their precious
precious blood,

Which holding in trust for me faithfully back
again give me many a year hence,
In unseen essence and odor of surface and grass,
centuries hence,
In blowing airs from the fields back again give
me my darlings, give my immortal heroes,
Exhale me them centuries hence, breathe me
their breath, let not an atom be lost,
O years and graves! O air and soil! O my
dead, an aroma sweet!
Exhale them perennial sweet death, years, cen-
turies hence.

CAMPS OF GREEN

NOT alone those camps of white, old comrades of the wars,
When as order'd forward, after a long march,
Footsore and weary, soon as the light lessens
we halt for the night,
Some of us so fatigued carrying the gun and
knapsack, dropping asleep in our tracks,
Others pitching the little tents, and the fires lit
up begin to sparkle,
Outposts of pickets posted surrounding alert
through the dark,
And a word provided for countersign, careful
for safety,
Till to the call of the drummers at daybreak
loudly beating the drums,
We rise up refresh'd, the night and sleep pass'd
over, and resume our journey,
Or proceed to battle.

Lo, the camps of the tents of green,
Which the days of peace keep filling, and the
days of war keep filling,
With a mystic army, (is it too order'd forward?
is it too only halting awhile,
Till night and sleep pass over?)

Now in those camps of green, in their tents
dotting the world,
In the parents, children, husbands, wives, in
them, in the old and young,
Sleeping under the sunlight, sleeping under the
moonlight, content and silent there at
last,
Behold the mighty bivouac-field and waiting-
camp of all,
Of the corps and generals all, and the President
over the corps and generals all,
And of each of us O soldiers, and of each and
all in the ranks we fought,
(There without hatred we all, all meet.)

For presently O soldiers, we too camp in our
place in the bivouac-camps of green,
But we need not provide for outposts, nor word
for the countersign,
Nor drummer to beat the morning drum.

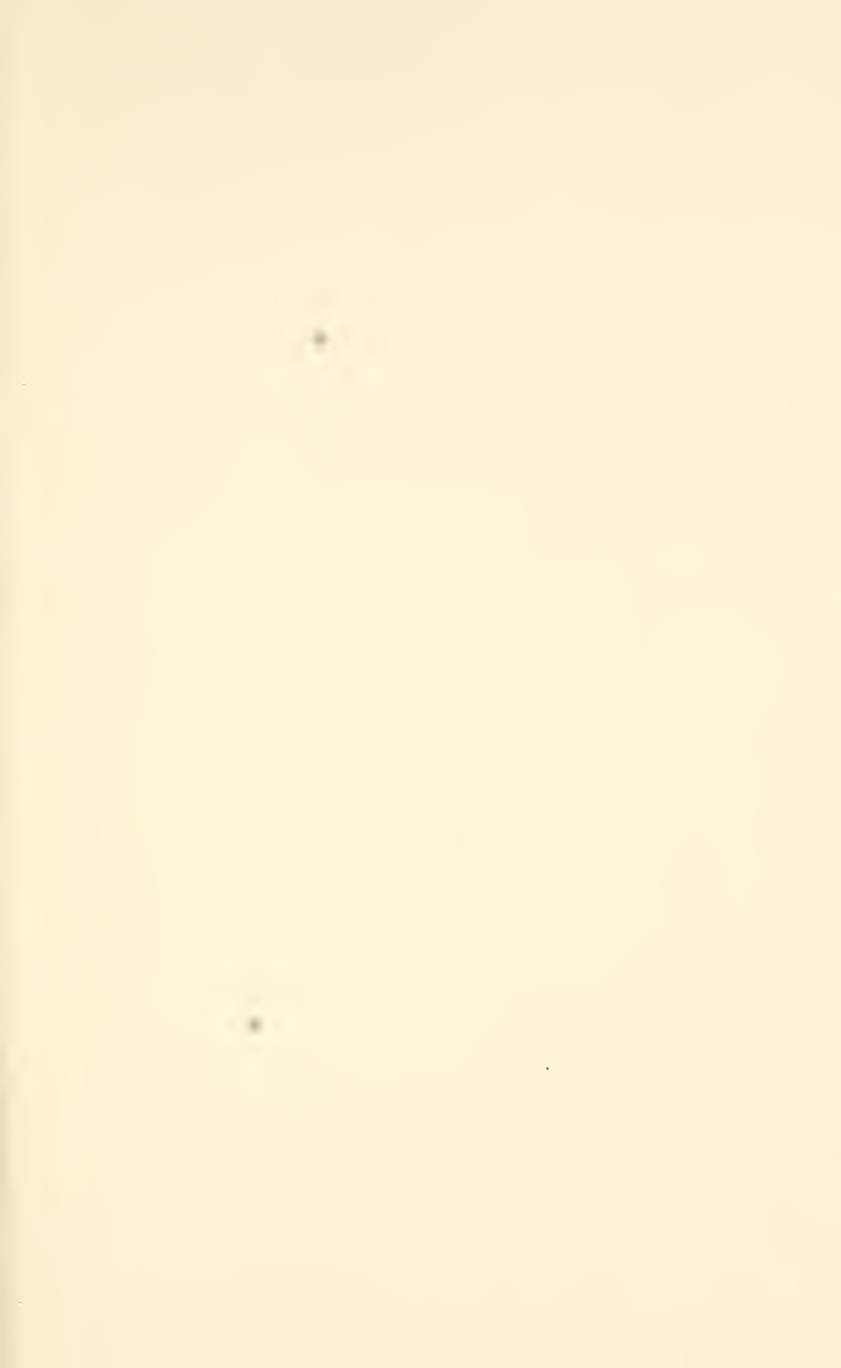


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