

DRUM TAPS.

MANHATTAN ARMING.

1.

First, O songs, for a prelude,

Lightly strike on the stretched tympanum, pride and joy in my city,

How she led the rest to arms--how she gave the cue,

How at once with lithe limbs, unwaiting a moment, she sprang;

O superb! O Manhattan, my own, my peerless!

O strongest you in the hour of danger, in crisis! O truer than steel!

How you sprang! how you threw off the costumes of peace with indifferent
hand;

How your soft opera-music changed, and the drum and fife were heard in
their stead;

How you led to the war, (that shall serve for our prelude, songs of
soldiers,)

How Manhattan drum-taps led.

2.

Forty years had I in my city seen soldiers parading;
Forty years as a pageant--till unawares, the Lady of this teeming and
turbulent city,
Sleepless, amid her ships, her houses, her incalculable wealth,
With her million children around her--suddenly,
At dead of night, at news from the South,
Incensed, struck with clenched hand the pavement.

A shock electric--the night sustained it;
Till, with ominous hum, our hive at daybreak poured out its myriads.

From the houses then, and the workshops, and through all the doorways,
Leaped they tumultuous--and lo! Manhattan arming.

3.

To the drum-taps prompt,
The young men falling in and arming;
The mechanics arming, the trowel, the jack-plane, the black-smith's hammer,
tossed aside with precipitation;
The lawyer leaving his office, and arming--the judge leaving the court;
The driver deserting his waggon in the street, jumping down, throwing the
reins abruptly down on the horses' backs;
The salesman leaving the store--the boss, book-keeper, porter, all leaving;
Squads gathering everywhere by common consent, and arming;

The new recruits, even boys--the old men show them how to wear their
accoutrements--they buckle the straps carefully;
Outdoors arming--indoors arming--the flash of the musket-barrels;
The white tents cluster in camps--the armed sentries around--the sunrise
cannon, and again at sunset;
Armed regiments arrive every day, pass through the city, and embark from
the wharves;
How good they look, as they tramp down to the river, sweaty, with their
guns on their shoulders!
How I love them! how I could hug them, with their brown faces, and their
clothes and knapsacks covered with dust!
The blood of the city up--armed! armed! the cry everywhere;
The flags flung out from the steeples of churches, and from all the public
buildings and stores;
The tearful parting--the mother kisses her son--the son kisses his mother;
Loth is the mother to part--yet not a word does she speak to detain him;
The tumultuous escort--the ranks of policemen preceding, clearing the way;
The unpent enthusiasm--the wild cheers of the crowd for their favourites;
The artillery--the silent cannons, bright as gold, drawn along, rumble
lightly over the stones;
Silent cannons--soon to cease your silence,
Soon, unlimbered, to begin the red business!
All the mutter of preparation--all the determined arming;
The hospital service--the lint, bandages, and medicines;
The women volunteering for nurses--the work begun for, in earnest--no mere
parade now;

War! an armed race is advancing!--the welcome for battle--no turning away;
War! be it weeks, months, or years--an armed race is advancing to welcome
it.

4.

Mannahatta a-march!--and it's O to sing it well!
It's O for a manly life in the camp!

5.

And the sturdy artillery!
The guns, bright as gold--the work for giants--to serve well the guns:
Unlimber them! no more, as the past forty years, for salutes for courtesies
merely;
Put in something else now besides powder and wadding.

6.

And you, Lady of Ships! you, Mannahatta!
Old matron of the city! this proud, friendly, turbulent city!
Often in peace and wealth you were pensive, or covertly frowned amid all
your children;

But now you smile with joy, exulting old Mannahatta!

1861.

Armed year! year of the struggle!

No dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you, terrible year!

Not you as some pale poetling, seated at a desk, lisping cadenzas piano;

But as a strong man, erect, clothed in blue clothes, advancing, carrying a
rifle on your shoulder,

With well-gristled body and sunburnt face and hands--with a knife in the
belt at your side,

As I heard you shouting loud--your sonorous voice ringing across the
continent;

Your masculine voice, O year, as rising amid the great cities,

Amid the men of Manhattan I saw you, as one of the workmen, the dwellers in
Manhattan;

Or with large steps crossing the prairies out of Illinois and Indiana,

Rapidly crossing the West with springy gait, and descending the
Alleghanies;

Or down from the great lakes, or in Pennsylvania, or on deck along the Ohio
river;

Or southward along the Tennessee or Cumberland rivers, or at Chattanooga on
the mountain-top,

Saw I your gait and saw I your sinewy limbs, clothed in blue, bearing

weapons, robust year;

Heard your determined voice, launched forth again and again;

Year that suddenly sang by the mouths of the round-lipped cannon,

I repeat you, hurrying, crashing, sad, distracted year.

THE UPRISING.

1.

Rise, O days, from your fathomless deeps, till you loftier and fiercer
sweep!

Long for my soul, hungering gymnastic, I devoured what the earth gave me;

Long I roamed the woods of the North--long I watched Niagara pouring;

I travelled the prairies over, and slept on their breast--I crossed the

Nevadas,

I crossed the plateaus;

I ascended the towering rocks along the Pacific, I sailed out to sea;

I sailed through the storm, I was refreshed by the storm;

I watched with joy the threatening maws of the waves;

I marked the white combs where they careered so high, curling over;

I heard the wind piping, I saw the black clouds;

Saw from below what arose and mounted, (O superb! O wild as my heart, and
powerful!)

Heard the continuous thunder, as it bellowed after the lightning;

Noted the slender and jagged threads of lightning, as sudden and fast amid
the din they chased each other across the sky;

--These, and such as these, I, elate, saw--saw with wonder, yet pensive and
masterful;

All the menacing might of the globe uprisen around me;

Yet there with my soul I fed--I fed content, supercilious.

2.

'Twas well, O soul! 'twas a good preparation you gave me!

Now we advance our latent and ampler hunger to fill;

Now we go forth to receive what the earth and the sea never gave us;

Not through the mighty woods we go, but through the mightier cities;

Something for us is pouring now, more than Niagara pouring;

Torrents of men, (sources and rills of the North-west, are you indeed
inexhaustible?)

What, to pavements and homesteads here--what were those storms of the
mountains and sea?

What, to passions I witness around me to-day, was the sea risen?

Was the wind piping the pipe of death under the black clouds?

Lo! from deeps more unfathomable, something more deadly and savage;

Manhattan, rising, advancing with menacing front--Cincinnati, Chicago,
unchained;

--What was that swell I saw on the ocean? behold what comes here!

How it climbs with daring feet and hands! how it dashes!

How the true thunder bellows after the lightning! how bright the flashes of
lightning!

How DEMOCRACY with desperate vengeful port strides on, shown through the
dark by those flashes of lightning!

Yet a mournful wail and low sob I fancied I heard through the dark,

In a lull of the deafening confusion.

3.

Thunder on! stride on, Democracy! strike with vengeful stroke!

And do you rise higher than ever yet, O days, O cities!

Crash heavier, heavier yet, O storms! you have done me good;

My soul, prepared in the mountains, absorbs your immortal strong nutriment.

Long had I walked my cities, my country roads, through farms, only half
satisfied;

One doubt, nauseous, undulating like a snake, crawled on the ground before
me,

Continually preceding my steps, turning upon me oft, ironically hissing
low;

--The cities I loved so well I abandoned and left--I sped to the
certainties suitable to me

Hungering, hungering, hungering, for primal energies, and Nature's
dauntlessness,

I refreshed myself with it only, I could relish it only;

I waited the bursting forth of the pent fire--on the water and air I waited
long.

--But now I no longer wait--I am fully satisfied--I am glutted;

I have witnessed the true lightning--I have witnessed my cities electric;

I have lived to behold man burst forth, and warlike America rise;

Hence I will seek no more the food of the northern solitary wilds,

No more on the mountains roam, or sail the stormy sea.

BEAT! BEAT! DRUMS!

1.

Beat! beat! drums!--Blow! bugles! blow!

Through the windows--through doors--burst like a force of ruthless men,

Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation;

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.

2.

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.

3.

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.

SONG OF THE BANNER AT DAYBREAK.

POET.

O a new song, a free song,
Flapping, flapping, flapping, flapping, by sounds, by voices clearer,
By the wind's voice and that of the drum,
By the banner's voice, and child's voice, and sea's voice, and father's
 voice,
Low on the ground and high in the air,
On the ground where father and child stand,
In the upward air where their eyes turn,
Where the banner at daybreak is flapping.

Words! book-words! what are you?
Words no more, for hearken and see,
My song is there in the open air--and I must sing,
With the banner and pennant a-flapping.

I'll weave the chord and twine in,
Man's desire and babe's desire--I'll twine them in, I'll put in life;
I'll put the bayonet's flashing point--I'll let bullets and slugs whizz;
I'll pour the verse with streams of blood, full of volition, full of joy;
Then loosen, launch forth, to go and compete,

With the banner and pennant a-flapping.

BANNER AND PENNANT.

Come up here, bard, bard;

Come up here, soul, soul;

Come up here, dear little child,

To fly in the clouds and winds with us, and play with the measureless
light.

CHILD.

Father, what is that in the sky beckoning to me with long finger?

And what does it say to me all the while?

FATHER.

Nothing, my babe, you see in the sky;

And nothing at all to you it says. But look you, my babe,

Look at these dazzling things in the houses, and see you the money-shops
opening;

And see you the vehicles preparing to crawl along the streets with goods:

These! ah, these! how valued and toiled for, these!

How envied by all the earth!

POET.

Fresh and rosy red, the sun is mounting high;
On floats the sea in distant blue, careering through its channels;
On floats the wind over the breast of the sea, setting in toward land;
The great steady wind from west and west-by-south,
Floating so buoyant, with milk-white foam on the waters.

But I am not the sea, nor the red sun;
I am not the wind, with girlish laughter;
Not the immense wind which strengthens--not the wind which lashes;
Not the spirit that ever lashes its own body to terror and death:
But I am of that which unseen comes and sings, sings, sings,
Which babbles in brooks and scoots in showers on the land;
Which the birds know in the woods, mornings and evenings,
And the shore-sands know, and the hissing wave, and that banner and
 pennant,
Aloft there flapping and flapping.

CHILD.

O father, it is alive--it is full of people--it has children!

O now it seems to me it is talking to its children!

I hear it--it talks to me--O it is wonderful!

O it stretches--it spreads and runs so fast! O my father,

It is so broad it covers the whole sky!

FATHER.

Cease, cease, my foolish babe,

What you are saying is sorrowful to me--much it displeases me;

Behold with the rest, again I say--behold not banners and pennants aloft;

But the well-prepared pavements behold--and mark the solid-walled houses.

BANNER AND PENNANT.

Speak to the child, O bard, out of Manhattan;

Speak to our children all, or north or south of Manhattan,

Where our factory-engines hum, where our miners delve the ground,

Where our hoarse Niagara rumbles, where our prairie-ploughs are ploughing;

Speak, O bard! point this day, leaving all the rest, to us over all--and

 yet we know not why;

For what are we, mere strips of cloth, profiting nothing,

Only flapping in the wind?

POET.

I hear and see not strips of cloth alone;

I hear the tramp of armies, I hear the challenging sentry;

I hear the jubilant shouts of millions of men--I hear LIBERTY!

I hear the drums beat, and the trumpets blowing;

I myself move abroad, swift-rising, flying then;

I use the wings of the land-bird, and use the wings of the sea-bird, and
look down as from a height.

I do not deny the precious results of peace--I see populous cities, with
wealth incalculable;

I see numberless farms--I see the farmers working in their fields or barns;

I see mechanics working--I see buildings everywhere founded, going up, or
finished;

I see trains of cars swiftly speeding along railroad tracks, drawn by the
locomotives;

I see the stores, depots, of Boston, Baltimore, Charleston, New Orleans;

I see far in the west the immense area of grain--I dwell a while, hovering;

I pass to the lumber forests of the north, and again to the southern
plantation, and again to California;

Sweeping the whole, I see the countless profit, the busy gatherings, earned
wages;

See the identity formed out of thirty-six spacious and haughty States, (and
many more to come;)

See forts on the shores of harbours--see ships sailing in and out;

Then over all, (aye! aye!) my little and lengthened pennant shaped like a

sword

Runs swiftly up, indicating war and defiance--And now the halyards have
raised it,

Side of my banner broad and blue--side of my starry banner,
Discarding peace over all the sea and land.

BANNER AND PENNANT.

Yet louder, higher, stronger, bard! yet farther, wider cleave!

No longer let our children deem us riches and peace alone;

We can be terror and carnage also, and are so now.

Not now are we one of these spacious and haughty States, (nor any five, nor
ten;)

Nor market nor depot are we, nor money-bank in the city;

But these, and all, and the brown and spreading land, and the mines below,
are ours;

And the shores of the sea are ours, and the rivers great and small;

And the fields they moisten are ours, and the crops, and the fruits are
ours;

Bays and channels, and ships sailing in and out, are ours--and we over all,

Over the area spread below, the three millions of square miles--the
capitals,

The thirty-five millions of people--O bard! in life and death supreme,

We, even we, from this day flaunt out masterful, high up above,

Not for the present alone, for a thousand years, chanting through you

This song to the soul of one poor little child.

CHILD.

O my father, I like not the houses;

They will never to me be anything--nor do I like money!

But to mount up there I would like, O father dear--that banner I like;

That pennant I would be, and must be.

FATHER.

Child of mine, you fill me with anguish,

To be that pennant would be too fearful;

Little you know what it is this day, and henceforth for ever;

It is to gain nothing, but risk and defy everything;

Forward to stand in front of wars--and O, such wars!--what have you to do
with them?

With passions of demons, slaughter, premature death?

POET.

Demons and death then I sing;

Put in all, aye all, will I--sword-shaped pennant for war, and banner so
broad and blue,

And a pleasure new and ecstatic, and the prattled yearning of children,

Blent with the sounds of the peaceful land, and the liquid wash of the sea;

And the icy cool of the far, far north, with rustling cedars and pines;

And the whirr of drums, and the sound of soldiers marching, and the hot sun
shining south;

And the beach-waves combing over the beach on my eastern shore, and my
western shore the same;

And all between those shores, and my ever-running Mississippi, with bends
and chutes;

And my Illinois fields, and my Kansas fields, and my fields of Missouri;

The CONTINENT--devoting the whole identity, without reserving an atom,

Pour in! whelm that which asks, which sings, with all, and the yield of
all.

BANNER AND PENNANT.

Aye all! for ever, for all!

From sea to sea, north and south, east and west,

Fusing and holding, claiming, devouring the whole;

No more with tender lip, nor musical labial sound,

But out of the night emerging for good, our voice persuasive no more,

Croaking like crows here in the wind.

POET.

My limbs, my veins dilate;

The blood of the world has filled me full--my theme is clear at last.

--Banner so broad, advancing out of the night, I sing you haughty and
resolute;

I burst through where I waited long, too long, deafened and blinded;

My sight, my hearing and tongue, are come to me, (a little child taught
me;)

I hear from above, O pennant of war, your ironical call and demand;

Insensate! insensate! yet I at any rate chant you, O banner!

Not houses of peace are you, nor any nor all their prosperity; if need be,
you shall have every one of those houses to destroy them;

You thought not to destroy those valuable houses, standing fast, full of
comfort, built with money;

May they stand fast, then? Not an hour, unless you, above them and all,
stand fast.

--O banner! not money so precious are you, nor farm produce you, nor the
material good nutriment,

Nor excellent stores, nor landed on wharves from the ships;

Not the superb ships, with sail-power or steam-power, fetching and carrying
cargoes,

Nor machinery, vehicles, trade, nor revenues,--But you, as henceforth I see
you,

Running up out of the night, bringing your cluster of stars, ever-enlarging
stars;

Divider of daybreak you, cutting the air, touched by the sun, measuring the
sky,

Passionately seen and yearned for by one poor little child,

While others remain busy, or smartly talking, for ever teaching thrift,
thrift;

O you up there! O pennant! where you undulate like a snake, hissing so
curious,

Out of reach--an idea only--yet furiously fought for, risking bloody
death--loved by me!

So loved! O you banner, leading the day, with stars brought from the night!

Valueless, object of eyes, over all and demanding all--O banner and
pennant!

I too leave the rest--great as it is, it is nothing--houses, machines are
nothing--I see them not;

I see but you, O warlike pennant! O banner so broad, with stripes, I sing
you only,

Flapping up there in the wind.

THE BIVOUAC'S FLAME.

By the bivouac's fitful flame,

A procession winding around me, solemn and sweet and slow;--but first I

note

The tents of the sleeping army, the fields' and woods' dim outline,

The darkness, lit by spots of kindled fire--the silence;

Like a phantom far or near an occasional figure moving;

The shrubs and trees, (as I lift my eyes they seem to be stealthily

watching me;)

While wind in procession thoughts, O tender and wondrous thoughts,

Of life and death--of home and the past and loved, and of those that are

far away;

A solemn and slow procession there as I sit on the ground,

By the bivouac's fitful flame.

BIVOUAC ON A MOUNTAIN-SIDE.

I see before me now a travelling army halting;

Below, a fertile valley spread, with barns, and the orchards of summer;

Behind, the terraced sides of a mountain, abrupt in places, rising high;

Broken with rocks, with clinging cedars, with tall shapes, dingily seen;

The numerous camp-fires scattered near and far, some away up on the
mountain;

The shadowy forms of men and horses, looming, large-sized, flickering;

And over all, the sky--the sky! far, far out of reach, studded with the
eternal stars.

CITY OF SHIPS.

City of ships!

(O the black ships! O the fierce ships!

O the beautiful, sharp-bowed steam-ships and sail-ships!)

City of the world! (for all races are here;

All the lands of the earth make contributions here;)

City of the sea! city of hurried and glittering tides!

City whose gleeful tides continually rush or recede, whirling in and out,
with eddies and foam!

City of wharves and stores! city of tall façades of marble and iron!

Proud and passionate city! mettlesome, mad, extravagant city!

Spring up, O city! not for peace alone, but be indeed yourself, warlike!

Fear not! submit to no models but your own, O city!

Behold me! incarnate me, as I have incarnated you!

I have rejected nothing you offered me--whom you adopted, I have adopted;

Good or bad, I never question you--I love all--I do not condemn anything;

I chant and celebrate all that is yours--yet peace no more;

In peace I chanted peace, but now the drum of war is mine;

War, red war, is my song through your streets, O city!

VIGIL ON THE FIELD.

VIGIL strange I kept on the field one night,
When you, my son and my comrade, dropped at my side that day.
One look I but gave, which your dear eyes returned with a look I shall
 never forget;
One touch of your hand to mine, O boy, reached up as you lay on the ground.
Then onward I sped in the battle, the even-contested battle;
Till, late in the night relieved, to the place at last again I made my way;
Found you in death so cold, dear comrade--found your body, son of
 responding kisses, (never again on earth responding;)
Bared your face in the starlight--curious the scene--cool blew the moderate
 night-wind.
Long there and then in vigil I stood, dimly around me the battlefield
 spreading;
Vigil wondrous and vigil sweet, there in the fragrant silent night.
But not a tear fell, not even a long-drawn sigh--Long, long I gazed;
Then on the earth partially reclining, sat by your side, leaning my chin in
 my hands;
Passing sweet hours, immortal and mystic hours, with you, dearest comrade--
Not a tear, not a word;
Vigil of silence, love, and death--vigil for you, my son and my soldier,
As onward silently stars aloft, eastward new ones upward stole;
Vigil final for you, brave boy, (I could not save you, swift was your
 death,

I faithfully loved you and cared for you living--I think we shall surely
meet again;)

Till at latest lingering of the night, indeed just as the dawn appeared,
My comrade I wrapped in his blanket, enveloped well his form,
Folded the blanket well, tucking it carefully over head, and carefully
under feet;

And there and then, and bathed by the rising sun, my son in his grave, in
his rude-dug grave, I deposited;

Ending my vigil strange with that--vigil of night and battlefield dim;
Vigil for boy of responding kisses, never again on earth responding;
Vigil for comrade swiftly slain, vigil I never forget--how as day
brightened

I rose from the chill ground, and folded my soldier well in his blanket,
And buried him where he fell.

THE FLAG.

Bathed in war's perfume--delicate flag!

O to hear you call the sailors and the soldiers! flag like a beautiful
woman!

O to hear the tramp, tramp, of a million answering men! O the ships they
arm with joy!

O to see you leap and beckon from the tall masts of ships!

O to see you peering down on the sailors on the decks!

Flag like the eyes of women.

THE WOUNDED.

A march in the ranks hard-pressed, and the road unknown;
A route through a heavy wood, with muffled steps in the darkness;
Our army foiled with loss severe, and the sullen remnant retreating;
Till after midnight glimmer upon us the lights of a dim-lighted building;
We come to an open space in the woods, and halt by the dim-lighted
 building.

'Tis a large old church, at the crossing roads--'tis now an impromptu
 hospital;

--Entering but for a minute, I see a sight beyond all the pictures and
 poems ever made:

Shadows of deepest, deepest black, just lit by moving, candles and lamps,
And by one great pitchy torch, stationary, with wild red flame, and clouds
 of smoke;

By these, crowds, groups of forms, vaguely I see, on the floor, some in the
 pews laid down;

At my feet more distinctly, a soldier, a mere lad, in danger of bleeding to
 death, (he is shot in the abdomen;)

I staunch the blood temporarily, (the youngster's face is white as a lily;)

Then before I depart I sweep my eyes o'er the scene, fain to absorb it all;

Faces, varieties, postures, beyond description, most in obscurity, some of
 them dead;

Surgeons operating, attendants holding lights, the smell of ether, the
 odour of blood;

The crowd, O the crowd of the bloody forms of soldiers--the yard outside
also filled;
Some on the bare ground, some on planks or stretchers, some in the death-
spasm sweating;
An occasional scream or cry, the doctor's shouted orders or calls;
The glisten of the little steel instruments catching the glint of the
torches;
These I resume as I chant--I see again the forms, I smell the odour;
Then hear outside the orders given, Fall in, my men, Fall in.
But first I bend to the dying lad--his eyes open--a half-smile gives he me;
Then the eyes close, calmly close: and I speed forth to the darkness,
Resuming, marching, as ever in darkness marching, on in the ranks,
The unknown road still marching.

A SIGHT IN CAMP.

1.

A sight in camp in the daybreak grey and dim,
As from my tent I emerge so early, sleepless,
As slow I walk in the cool fresh air the path near by the hospital tent,
Three forms I see on stretchers lying, brought out there, untended lying;
Over each the blanket spread, ample brownish woollen blanket,
Grey and heavy blanket, folding, covering all.

2.

Curious, I halt, and silent stand;
Then with light fingers I from the face of the nearest, the first, just
 lift the blanket;
Who are you, elderly man, so gaunt and grim, with well-greyed hair, and
 flesh all sunken about the eyes?
Who are you, my dear comrade?

Then to the second I step--And who are you, my child and darling?
Who are you, sweet boy, with cheeks yet blooming?

Then to the third--a face nor child nor old, very calm, as of beautiful

yellow-white ivory:

Young man, I think I know you--I think this face of yours is the face of
the Christ Himself;

Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again He lies.

A GRAVE.

1.

As toilsome I wandered Virginia's woods,
To the music of rustling leaves kicked by my feet--for 'twas autumn--
I marked at the foot of a tree the grave of a soldier;
Mortally wounded he, and buried on the retreat--easily all could I
 understand;
The halt of a mid-day hour--when, Up! no time to lose! Yet this sign left
On a tablet scrawled and nailed on the tree by the grave,
Bold, cautious, true, and my loving comrade.

2.

Long, long I muse,--then on my way go wandering,
Many a changeful season to follow, and many a scene of life.
Yet at times through changeful season and scene, abrupt,--alone, or in the
 crowded street,--
Comes before me the unknown soldier's grave, comes the inscription rude in
 Virginia's woods,
Bold, cautious, true, and my loving comrade.

THE 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, Years
hence) "of these scenes, of these furious passions, these chances,
Of unsurpassed 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 tremendous, what deepest remains?"

2.

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, covered 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 captured 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,
In nature's reverie sad, with hinged knees returning, I enter the
doors--(while for you up there, Whoever you are, follow me 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 roofed 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 filled with clotted rags and blood, emptied, and filled 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, hospital doors!)

The crushed 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 curved 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 looked 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 fractured 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.

3.

Thus in silence, in dreams' projections,

Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals;

The hurt and the 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 crossed and rested,

Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips.

A LETTER FROM CAMP.

1.

"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."

2.

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 trellised 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.

3.

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 white hair, nor adjust her cap.

4.

Open the envelope quickly;
O this is not our son's writing, yet his name is signed;
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--"gun-shot wound in the breast, cavalry skirmish, taken
 to hospital,
At present low, but will soon be better."

5.

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.

6.

"Grieve not so, dear mother," the just-grown daughter speaks through her
sobs;

The little sisters huddle around, speechless and dismayed;

"See, dearest mother, the letter says Pete will soon be better."

7.

Alas! poor boy, he will never be better, (nor maybe 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 dressed in black;

By day her meals untouched--then at night fitfully 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!

WAR DREAMS.

1.

In clouds descending, in midnight sleep, of many a face in battle,
Of the look at first of the mortally wounded, of that indescribable look,
Of the dead on their backs, with arms extended wide--
I dream, I dream, I dream.

2.

Of scenes of nature, the fields and the mountains,
Of the skies so beautiful after the storm, and at night the
moon so unearthly bright,
Shining sweetly, shining down, where we dig the trenches,
and gather the heaps--
I dream, I dream, I dream.

3.

Long have they passed, long lapsed--faces, and trenches, and fields:
Long through the carnage I moved with a callous composure, or away from the
fallen

Onward I sped at the time. But now of their faces and forms, at night,
I dream, I dream, I dream.

THE VETERAN'S VISION.

While my wife at my side lies slumbering, and the wars are over long,
And my head on the pillow rests at home, and the mystic midnight passes,
And through the stillness, through the dark, I hear, just hear, the breath
of my infant,

There in the room, as I wake from sleep, this vision presses upon me.
The engagement opens there and then, in my busy brain unreal;
The skirmishers begin--they crawl cautiously ahead--I hear the irregular
snap! snap!

I hear the sound of the different missiles--the short t-h-t! t-h-t! of
the rifle-balls;

I see the shells exploding, leaving small white clouds--I hear the great
shells shrieking as they pass;

The grape, like the hum and whirr of wind through the trees, (quick,
tumultuous, now the contest rages!)

All the scenes at the batteries themselves rise in detail before me again;

The crashing and smoking--the pride of the men in their pieces;

The chief gunner ranges and sights his piece, and selects a fuse of the
right time;

After firing, I see him lean aside, and look eagerly off to note the
effect;

--Elsewhere I hear the cry of a regiment charging--the young colonel leads
himself this time, with brandished sword;

I see the gaps cut by the enemy's volleys, quickly filled up--no delay;

I breathe the suffocating smoke--then the flat clouds hover low, concealing
all;

Now a strange lull comes for a few seconds, not a shot fired on either
side;

Then resumed, the chaos louder than ever, with eager calls, and orders of
officers;

While from some distant part of the field the wind wafts to my ears a shout
of applause, (some special success;)

And ever the sound of the cannon, far or near, rousing, even in dreams, a
devilish exultation, and all the old mad joy, in the depths of my
soul;

And ever the hastening of infantry shifting positions--batteries, cavalry,
moving hither and thither;

The falling, dying, I heed not--the wounded, dripping and red, I heed not--
some to the rear are hobbling;

Grime, heat, rush--aides-de-camp galloping by, or on a full run:

With the patter of small arms, the warning s-s-t of the rifles, (these in
my vision I hear or see,)

And bombs bursting in air, and at night the vari-coloured rockets.

O TAN-FACED PRAIRIE BOY.

O tan-faced prairie boy!

Before you came to camp came many a welcome gift;

Praises and presents came, and nourishing food--till at last, among the
recruits,

You came, taciturn, with nothing to give--we but looked on each other,

When lo! more than all the gifts of the world you gave me.

MANHATTAN FACES.

1.

Give me the splendid silent sun, with all his beams full-dazzling;

Give me juicy autumnal fruit, ripe and red from the orchard;

Give me a field where the unmowed grass grows;

Give me an arbour, give me the trellised grape;

Give me fresh corn and wheat--give me serene-moving animals, teaching
content;

Give me nights perfectly quiet, as on high plateaus west of the
Mississippi, and I looking up at the stars;

Give me odorous at sunrise a garden of beautiful flowers, where I can walk
undisturbed;

Give me for marriage a sweet-breathed woman, of whom I should never tire;

Give me a perfect child--give me, away, aside from the noise of the world,
a rural domestic life;

Give me to warble spontaneous songs, relieved, recluse by myself, for my
own ears only;

Give me solitude--give me Nature--give me again, O Nature, your primal
sanities!

--These, demanding to have them, tired with ceaseless excitement, and
racked by the war-strife,

These to procure incessantly asking, rising in cries from my heart,

While yet incessantly asking, still I adhere to my city;

Day upon day, and year upon year, O city, walking your streets,
Where you hold me enchained a certain time, refusing to give me up,
Yet giving to make me gluttoned, enriched of soul--you give me for ever
faces;

O I see what I sought to escape, confronting, reversing my cries;
I see my own soul trampling down what it asked for.

2.

Keep your splendid silent sun;
Keep your woods, O Nature, and the quiet places by the woods;
Keep your fields of clover and timothy, and your cornfields and orchards;
Keep the blossoming buckwheat fields, where the ninth-month bees hum.
Give me faces and streets! give me these phantoms incessant and endless
along the trottoirs!
Give me interminable eyes! give me women! give me comrades and lovers by
the thousand!
Let me see new ones every day! let me hold new ones by the hand every day!
Give me such shows! give me the streets of Manhattan!
Give me Broadway, with the soldiers marching--give me the sound of the
trumpets and drums!
The soldiers in companies or regiments--some starting away, flushed and
reckless;
Some, their time up, returning, with thinned ranks--young, yet very old,
worn, marching, noticing nothing;

--Give me the shores and the wharves heavy-fringed with the black ships!

O such for me! O an intense life! O full to repletion, and varied!

The life of the theatre, bar-room, huge hotel, for me!

The saloon of the steamer, the crowded excursion, for me! the torchlight
procession!

The dense brigade, bound for the war, with high-piled military waggons
following;

People, endless, streaming, with strong voices, passions, pageants;

Manhattan streets, with their powerful throbs, with the beating drums, as
now;

The endless and noisy chorus, the rustle and clank of muskets, even the
sight of the wounded;

Manhattan crowds, with their turbulent musical chorus--with varied chorus
and light of the sparkling eyes;

Manhattan faces and eyes for ever for me!

OVER THE CARNAGE.

1.

Over the carnage rose prophetic a voice,--
Be not disheartened--Affection shall solve the problems of Freedom yet;
Those who love each other shall become invincible--they shall yet make
Columbia victorious.

Sons of the Mother of all! you shall yet be victorious!
You shall yet laugh to scorn the attacks of all the remainder of the earth.

No danger shall baulk Columbia's lovers;
If need be, a thousand shall sternly immolate themselves for one.

One from Massachusetts shall be a Missourian's comrade;
From Maine and from hot Carolina, and another an Oregonese, shall be
friends triune,
More precious to each other than all the riches of the earth.

To Michigan, Florida perfumes shall tenderly come;
Not the perfumes of flowers, but sweeter, and wafted beyond death.

It shall be customary in the houses and streets to see manly affection;
The most dauntless and rude shall touch face to face lightly;

The dependence of Liberty shall be lovers,
The continuance of Equality shall be comrades.

These shall tie you and band you stronger than hoops of iron;
I, ecstatic, O partners! O lands! with the love of lovers tie you.

2.

Were you looking to be held together by the lawyers?
Or by an agreement on a paper? or by arms?
--Nay--nor the world nor any living thing will so cohere.

THE MOTHER OF ALL.

Pensive, on her dead gazing, I heard the Mother of all,

Desperate, on the torn bodies, on the forms covering the battlefields,

gazing;

As she called to her earth with mournful voice while she stalked.

"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,

And all you essences of soil and growth--and you, O my rivers' depths;

And you mountain-sides--and the woods where my dear children's blood,

trickling, reddened;

And you trees, down in your roots, to bequeath to all future trees,

My dead absorb--my young men's beautiful bodies absorb--and their precious,

precious, precious blood;

Which, holding in trust for me, faithfully back again give me, many a year

hence,

In unseen essence and odour 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, centuries hence."

CAMPS OF GREEN.

1.

Not alone our camps of white, O soldiers,
When, as ordered 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 refreshed, the night and sleep passed over, and resume our
 journey,
Or proceed to battle.

2.

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 ordered forward? is it too only halting a
 while,

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 us and ours and all,
Of our 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 fight,
There without hatred we shall 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.

DIRGE FOR TWO VETERANS.

1.

The last sunbeam
Lightly falls from the finished Sabbath
On the pavement here--and, there beyond, it is looking
Down a new-made double grave.

2.

Lo! the moon ascending!
Up from the east, the silvery round moon;
Beautiful over the house-tops, ghastly, phantom moon;
Immense and silent moon.

3.

I see a sad procession,
And I hear the sound of coming full-keyed bugles;
All the channels of the city streets they're flooding,
As with voices and with tears.

4.

I hear the great drums pounding,
And the small drums steady whirring;
And every blow of the great convulsive drums
Strikes me through and through.

5.

For the son is brought with the father;
In the foremost ranks of the fierce assault they fell;
Two veterans, son and father, dropped together,
And the double grave awaits them.

6.

Now nearer blow the bugles,
And the drums strike more convulsive;
And the daylight o'er the pavement quite has faded,
And the strong dead-march enwraps me.

7.

In the eastern sky up-buoying,
The sorrowful vast phantom moves illumined,
'Tis some mother's large, transparent face,
In heaven brighter growing.

8.

O strong dead-march, you please me!
O moon immense, with your silvery face you soothe me!
O my soldiers twain! O my veterans, passing to burial!
What I have I also give you.

9.

The moon gives you light,
And the bugles and the drums give you music;
And my heart, O my soldiers, my veterans,
My heart gives you love.

SURVIVORS.

How solemn, as one by one,

As the ranks returning, all worn and sweaty--as the men file by where I
stand;

As the faces, the masks appear--as I glance at the faces, studying the
masks;

As I glance upward out of this page, studying you, dear friend, whoever you
are;--

How solemn the thought of my whispering soul, to each in the ranks, and to
you!

I see, behind each mask, that wonder, a kindred soul.

O the bullet could never kill what you really are, dear friend,

Nor the bayonet stab what you really are.

--The soul, yourself, I see, great as any, good as the best,

Waiting secure and content,--which the bullet could never kill,

Nor the bayonet stab, O friend!

HYMN OF DEAD SOLDIERS.

1.

One breath, O my silent soul!

A perfumed thought--no more I ask, for the sake of all dead soldiers.

2.

Buglers off in my armies!

At present I ask not you to sound;

Not at the head of my cavalry, all on their spirited horses,

With their sabres drawn and glistening, and carbines clanking 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.

3.

But aside from these, and the crowd's hurrahs, and the land's
congratulations,
Admitting around me comrades close, unseen by the rest, and voiceless,
I chant this chant of my silent soul, in the name of all dead soldiers.

4.

Faces so pale, with wondrous eyes, very dear, gather closer yet;
Draw close, but speak not.
Phantoms, welcome, divine and tender!
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 now is over;
But love is not over--and what love, O comrades!
Perfume from battlefields rising--up from foetor arising.

Perfume therefore my chant, O love! immortal love!
Give me to bathe the memories of all dead soldiers.

Perfume all! make all wholesome!

O love! O chant! solve all with the last chemistry.

Give me exhaustless--make me a fountain,

That I exhale love from me wherever I go,

For the sake of all dead soldiers.

SPIRIT WHOSE WORK IS DONE.

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 years 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;

While the muskets of the young men yet lean over their shoulders;

While I look on the bayonets bristling over their shoulders;

While 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, as 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
convulsive!

Let them scorch and blister out of my chants, when you are gone;

Let them identify you to the future in these songs!

RECONCILIATION.

Word over all, beautiful as the sky!

Beautiful that war, and all its deeds of carnage, must in time be utterly
lost;

That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly, softly wash
again, and ever again, this soiled world.

For my enemy is dead--a man divine as myself is dead.

I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin--I draw near;

I bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

AFTER THE WAR.

To the leavened soil they trod, calling, I sing, for the last;
Not cities, nor man alone, nor war, nor the dead:
But forth from my tent emerging for good--loosing, untying the tent-ropes;
In the freshness, the forenoon air, in the far-stretching circuits and
 vistas, again to peace restored;
To the fiery fields emanative, and the endless vistas beyond--to the south
 and the north;
To the leavened soil of the general Western World, to attest my songs,
To the average earth, the wordless earth, witness of war and peace,
To the Alleghanian hills, and the tireless Mississippi,
To the rocks I, calling, sing, and all the trees in the woods,
To the plain of the poems of heroes, to the prairie spreading wide,
To the far-off sea, and the unseen winds, and the sane impalpable air.
And responding they answer all, (but not in words,)
The average earth, the witness of war and peace, acknowledges mutely;
The prairie draws me close, as the father, to bosom broad, the son:--
The Northern ice and rain, that began me, nourish me to the end;
But the hot sun of the South is to ripen my songs.