

Sections from “Memoranda During the War”

By Walt Whitman, published 1875

“During the Union War I commenced at the close of 1862, and continued steadily through '63, '64, and '65, to visit the sick and wounded of the Army, both on the field and in the Hospitals in and around Washington city. From the first I kept little note-books for impromptu jottings in pencil to refresh my memory of name and circumstances, and what was specially want, &c”.

-- The Dead in this War -- there they lie, strewing the fields and woods and valleys and battle-fields of the South -- Virginia, the Peninsula -- Malvern Hill and Fair Oaks -- the banks of the Chicka hominy -- the terraces of Fredericksburgh -- Antietam bridge -- the grisly ravines of Manassas -- the bloody promenade of the Wilderness -- the varieties of the *strayed* dead, (the estimate of the War Department is 25,000 National soldiers kill'd in battle and never buried at all, 5,000 drown'd -- 15,000 inhumed strangers or on the march in haste, in hitherto unfound localities -- 2,000 graves cover'd by sand and mud, by Mississippi freshets, 3,000 carried away by caving-in of banks, &c.,) -- Gettysburgh, the West, Southwest -- Vicksburg -- Chattanooga -- the trenches of Petersburg -- the numberless battles, camps, Hospitals everywhere

-- the crop reap'd by the mighty reapers, Typhoid, Dysentery, Inflammations -- and blackest and loathesomest of all, the dead and living burial-pits, the Prison-Pens of Andersonville, Salisbury, Belle-Isle, &c., (not Dante's pictured Hell and all its woes, its degradations, filthy torments, excell'd those Prisons) -- the dead, the dead, the dead -- *our* dead -- or South or North, ours all, (all, all, all, finally dear to me) --

- or East or West -- Atlantic Coast or Mississippi Valley -- Some where they crawl'd to die, alone, in bushes, low gulleys, or on the sides of hills -- (there, in secluded spots, their skeletons, bleach'd bones, tufts of hair, buttons, fragments of clothing, are occasionally found, yet) -- our young men once so handsome and so joyous, taken from us -- the son from the mother, the husband from the wife, the dear friend from the dear friend -- the clusters of camp graves, in Georgia, the Carolinas, and in Tennessee -- the single graves in the woods or by the road-side, (hundreds, thousands, obliterated)

-- the corpses floated down the rivers, and caught and lodged, (dozens, scores, floated down the Upper Potomac, after the cavalry engagements, the pursuit of Lee, following Gettysburgh) -- some lie at the bottom of the sea -- the general Million, and the special Cemeteries in almost all the States -- the Infinite Dead -- (the land entire is saturated, perfumed with their impalpable ashes' exhalation in Nature's chemistry distill'd, and shall be so forever, and every grain of wheat and ear of corn, and every flower that grows, and every breath we draw,) -- not only Northern dead leavening Southern soil -- thousands, aye tens of thousands, of Southerners, crumble to-day in Northern earth.

And everywhere among these countless graves -- everywhere in the many Soldiers Cemeteries of the Nation, (there are over seventy of them) -- as at the time in the vast trenches, the depositories of slain, Northern and Southern, after the great battles -- not only where the scathing trail pass'd those years, but radiating since in all the peaceful quarters of the land -- we see, and see, and ages yet may see, on monuments and gravestones, singly or in masses, to thousands or tens of thousands, the significant word **UNKNOWN.**”