

**THE WOUND DRESSER; A SERIES  
OF LETTERS WRITTEN FROM THE  
HOSPITALS IN WASHINGTON  
DURING THE WAR OF THE  
REBELLION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649008209

The wound dresser; a series of letters written from the hospitals in Washington during the war of the rebellion by Walt Whitman & Richard Maurice Bucke

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**WALT WHITMAN & RICHARD MAURICE BUCKE**

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THE HELIOTYPE PRINTING CO. BOSTON

From a Photograph by Gardner, Washington

THE  
**WOUND DRESSER**

A Series of Letters  
Written from the Hospitals in Washington  
During the War of the Rebellion

By  
**WALT WHITMAN**

Edited by  
**RICHARD MAURICE BUCKE, M.D.**  
*One of Whitman's Literary Executors*



Boston  
**SMALL, MAYNARD & COMPANY**  
1898

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*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.)*

*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.*

*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.)*

*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.)*

*The Wound Dresser.*





## PREFACE

AS introduction to these letters from Walt Whitman to his mother, I have availed myself of three of Whitman's communications to the press covering the time during which the material which composes this volume was being written. These communications (parts of which, but in no case the whole, were used by Whitman in his "Memoranda of the Secession War") seem to me to form, in spite of certain duplications, which to my mind have the force, not the weakness, of repetition, quite an ideal background to the letters to Mrs. Whitman, since they give a full and free description of the circumstances and surroundings in the midst of which those were composed. Readers who desire a still more extended account of the man himself, his work and environment at that time, may consult with profit the Editor's "Walt Whitman" (pp. 34-44), O'Connor's "Good Gray Poet" (included in that volume, pp. 99-130), "Specimen Days" (pp. 26-63, included in Walt Whitman's "Complete Prose Works"), and above all the section of "Leaves of Grass" called "Drum-Taps." I do not believe that it is in the power of any man now living to make an important addition to the vivid picture of those days and nights in the hospitals drawn by Whitman himself and to be found in his published prose and verse, and, above all, in the living words of the present letters to his mother. These

## Preface

last were written on the spot, as the scenes and incidents, in all their living and sombre colors, passed before his eyes, while his mind and heart were full of the sights and sounds, the episodes and agonies, of those terrible hours. How could any one writing in cold blood, to-day, hope to add words of any value to those he wrote then?

Perhaps, in conclusion, it may be as well to repeat what was said in the introduction to a former volume, — that these letters make no pretensions as literature. They are, as indeed is all that Whitman has written (as he himself has over and over again said), something quite different from that — something much less to the average cultured and learned man, something much more to the man or woman who comes within range of their attraction. But doubtless the critics will still insist that, if they are not literature, they ought to be, or otherwise should not be printed, failing (as is their wont) to comprehend that there are other qualities and characteristics than the literary, some of them as important and as valuable, which may be more or less adequately conveyed by print.

R. M. B.