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TALES OF SOLDIERS AND
CIVILIANS**

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AMBROSE BIERCE

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CIVILIANS**

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 2814.

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE. BY AMBROSE BIERCE.

IN ONE VOLUME.

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE

TALES
or
SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS.

BY
AMBROSE BIERCE.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1892.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE SUITABLE SURROUNDINGS	7
The Night	7
The Day before	10
The Day after	16

SOLDIERS.

A HORSEMAN IN THE SKY	23
AN OCCURRENCE AT OWL CREEK BRIDGE	35
CHICKAMAUGA	53
A SON OF THE GODS	65
ONE OF THE MISSING	78
KILLED AT RESACA	100
THE AFFAIR AT COULTER'S NOTCH	112
A TOUGH TUSSLE	128
THE COUP DE GRÂCE	142
PARKER ADDERSON, PHILOSOPHER	153

CIVILIANS.

	PAGE
A WATCHER BY THE DEAD	167
THE MAN AND THE SNAKE	187
A HOLY TERROR	200
AN INHABITANT OF CARCOSA	226
THE BOARDED WINDOW	233
THE MIDDLE TOE OF THE RIGHT FOOT	242
HATTA THE SHEPHERD	258
AN HEIRESS FROM REDHORSE	268

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE.

THE SUITABLE SURROUNDINGS.

THE NIGHT.

ONE midsummer night a farmer's boy living about ten miles from the city of Cincinnati, was following a bridle path through a dense and dark forest. He had been searching for some missing cows, and at nightfall found himself a long way from home, and in a part of the country with which he was only partly familiar. But he was a stout-hearted lad, and, knowing his general direction from his home, he plunged into the forest without hesitation, guided by the stars. Coming into the bridle path, and observing that it ran in the right direction, he followed it.

The night was clear, but in the woods it was exceedingly dark. It was more by the sense of touch

than by that of sight that the lad kept the path. He could not, indeed, very easily go astray; the undergrowth on both sides was so thick as to be almost impenetrable. He had gone into the forest a mile or more when he was surprised to see a feeble gleam of light shining through the foliage skirting the path on his left. The sight of it startled him, and set his heart beating audibly.

"The old Breede house is somewhere about here," he said to himself. "This must be the other end of the path which we reach it by from our side. Ugh! what should a light be doing there? I don't like it."

Nevertheless, he pushed on. A moment later and he had emerged from the forest into a small, open space, mostly upgrown to brambles. There were remnants of a rotting fence. A few yards from the trail, in the middle of the clearing, was the house, from which the light came through an unglazed window. The window had once contained glass, but that and its supporting frame had long ago yielded to missiles flung by hands of venturesome boys, to attest alike their courage and their hostility to the supernatural; for the Breede house bore the evil reputation of being haunted. Possibly it was not, but even the hardiest sceptic could not

deny that it was deserted—which, in rural regions, is much the same thing.

Looking at the mysterious dim light shining from the ruined window, the boy remembered with apprehension that his own hand had assisted at the destruction. His penitence was, of course, poignant in proportion to its tardiness and inefficacy. He half expected to be set upon by all the unworldly and bodiless malevolences whom he had outraged by assisting to break alike their windows and their peace. Yet this stubborn lad, shaking in every limb, would not retreat. The blood in his veins was strong and rich with the iron of the frontiersman. He was but two removes from the generation which had subdued the Indian. He started to pass the house.

As he was going by, he looked in at the blank window space, and saw a strange and terrifying sight—the figure of a man seated in the centre of the room, at a table upon which lay some loose sheets of paper. The elbows rested on the table, the hands supporting the head, which was uncovered. On each side the fingers were pushed into the hair. The face showed pale in the light of a single candle a little to one side. The flame illuminated that side of the face, the other was in deep shadow. The