

Contemporary Reviews

Drum-Taps

[Review of Drum-Taps]

The reader who is acquainted with the noble service that Walt Whitman has rendered to our wounded soldiers will feel inclined to judge favorably of his poetical efforts. He will also be impressed with the fact that the author is possessed of much poetic feeling; but yet will scarcely be convinced that the disjointed prose of 'Drum-taps' is entitled to be considered as poetry. There is a sense in which we speak of the poetry of the clouds-formless, voiceless as they are. In a somewhat similar sense 'Drum-taps' may be called poetry. The lines therein contained, while they are as ragged and broken as the storm-cloud, and as destitute-many of them-of any intelligible utterance, yet leave with the reader a vague sense of poetic exaltation. Undoubtedly, the author has capabilities. There are passages in the lines entitled 'Captain, My Captain,' and in the war-lyric commencing 'Beat, beat, drums,' that give abundant evidence that Walt Whitman could write true poetry if he would only consent to write either rhyme or reason. His absurd theories of composition have hitherto prevented him from doing either, except at the rarest intervals.