

from Specimen Days by Walt Whitman
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A New York Soldier

This afternoon, July 22nd, I have spent a long time with Oscar F. Wilber, Company G, 154th New York, low with chronic diarrhea, and a bad wound also. He asked me to read him a chapter in the New Testament. I complied, and asked him what I should read. He said, "Make your own choice." I opened at the close of one of the first books of the evangelists, and read the chapters describing the latter hours of Christ, and the scenes at the crucifixion. The poor, wasted young man asked me to read the following chapter also, how Christ rose again. I read very slowly, for Oscar was feeble. It pleased him very much, yet the tears were in his eyes. He asked me if I enjoyed religion. I said, "Perhaps not, my dear, in the way you mean, and yet, maybe, it is the same thing." He said, "It is my chief reliance." He talked of death, and said he did not fear it. I said, "Why, Oscar, don't you think you will get well?" He said, "I may, but it is not possible." He spoke calmly of his condition. The wound was very bad, it discharged much. Then the diarrhea had prostrated him, and I felt that he was even then the same as dying. He behaved very manly and affectionate. The kiss I gave him as I was about leaving he returned fourfold. He gave me his mother's address, Mrs. Sally D. Wilbur, Alleghany Post Office, Cattaraugus County, N.Y. I had several such interviews with him. He died a few days after the one just described.

