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The Soldier's Pen: Firsthand Impressions of the Civil War

Robert E. Bonner

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They are all infantrymen; none were commissioned officers. One is a German-speaking artist whose sole record is nineteen stunning watercolors that cover a year's enlistment. Another is a free black from Syracuse, New York. Six are from slave states, one of whom was a Unionist. Drawing from the more than 60,000 documents housed in the privately held Gilder Lehrman Collection, Robert E. Bonner has movingly reconstructed the experiences of sixteen Civil War soldiers, using their own accounts to knit together a ground-level view of the entire conflict. The immediacy of diaries and the intimacy of letters to loved ones accompany the humor of an anonymous cartoonist from Massachusetts, the vivid paintings of Private Henry Berckhoff.

All reproduced for the first time in *The Soldier's Pen*, the documents and images that Bonner weaves together, providing context and explanation as required, powerfully re-create the day-to-day lives of the soldiers who fought and died for Union and Confederacy. Not since the 2000 publication of Robert Sneden's paintings and papers in *Eye of the Storm* has a collection of original Civil War documents so evocatively captured the war.

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