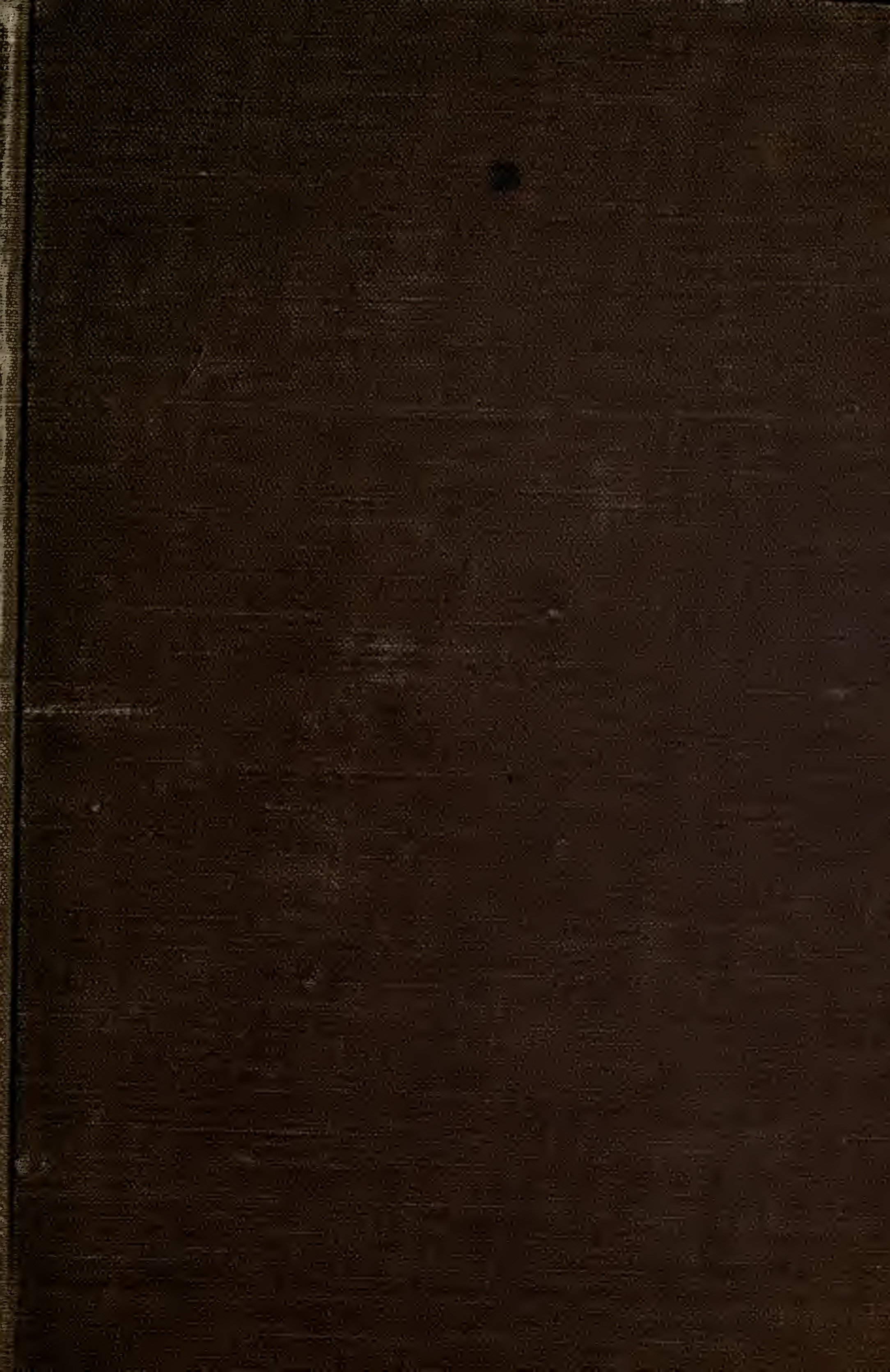

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WALT WHITMAN

(THE CAMDEN SAGE)

AS

RELIGIOUS AND MORAL TEACHER

A

STUDY

BY

WILLIAM NORMAN GUTHRIE

CINCINNATI
THE ROBERT CLARKE COMPANY
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Only one hundred copies of this brochure on laid paper have been printed.

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A WORD TO THE READER.

This essay, the last in the recently published volume, "Modern Poet Prophets," appears by itself alone for such as desire to see nothing between cover and cover but an honest attempt to remove obstacles of prejudice from the path of him who would seriously approach our Titan.

Few like to admit that they have been converted. It is a dangerous admission. It implies the possibility of further conversion. We forget that firmness, obstinate tenacity, virtues in conduct are vices in thought. To be ever ready to change when superior reasons are against us, is just that unchangeable loyalty to truth we commend. We must abandon the lower round of the ladder for the higher, be constantly inconstant, if we would mount.

It may seem a questionable expedient to print in the Appendix extracts from an insolent critique. Still, the extracts when hostile, are so ferocious as to condemn themselves. They will, however serve to prove that the writer of this essay went through the usual phases of amazement, horror, indignation, fury, exasperation, disapproval, qualified dislike, qualified liking, till at length he is forced by common honesty to confess himself an ardent lover of much that our great American champion of Democracy, political and spiritual, has written.

For my own part, I am not coward enough to be afraid to own my whole-hearted loyalty to the teacher, even though I may differ from him on many points deemed cardinal by most men. He himself desires us to be independent of him. He bids us not "look through his eyes," but our own. The Whitmanite does

not worship Whitman, but joins Whitman in the worship of independent manhood, striving to be himself *the man*.

Many make extravagant claims for Whitman. Others still think it worth their while to vent their wrath in vehement epithets, or express a refined scorn by a slight lift of the tip of the aquiline nose when his name is mentioned. For my part I am content to be in such good company as I find myself, when among admirers and reverers of Whitman. Not English literary men alone—Tennyson, A. C. Swinburne, the Rossettis, E. Dowden, J. A. Symonds, Mrs. Gilchrist, Miss Blind, and a host of others deservedly famous—but Americans of various types, like the Stedmans, father and son, John Burroughs, Whitelaw Reid, Charles A. Dana, John Swinton, George W. Childs, and many, many more, who knew the man as well as his work, and often loved the work for the sake of the man whom they have somehow succeeded in imposing on us as the "Good Gray Poet," and the "Camden Sage," titles which will do more for his fame, surely than the laureateship did for Wordsworth, or the barony for Tennyson—nay, more than all laudatory critiques and biographies. What's in a name? An influence, second only to a living character. Even his haters and assailers bow before the venerable, picturesque champion of the doctrine of the "God" in any and every man, the prophet of a great America about to be discovered, when the chaos of these states has become cosmos by the creation of a new type of athletic, yet spiritual, manhood.

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WALT WHITMAN

(THE CAMDEN SAGE)

AS RELIGIOUS AND MORAL TEACHER.

THE RELIGIOUS TEACHER.

A man of genius has his phases of inner growth, . . . and to look for a narrow, definite, consistent body of doctrine in his writings is to look for something that is not there, that was never intended to be there, and that could not, in the very nature of things, have been there.*

Doubtless something of this sort was in Walt Whitman's mind when he wrote:

> I charge you forever reject those who would expound me, for I can not expound myself.
> I charge that there be no theory or school founded out of me.
> I charge you to leave all free, as I have left all free.
>
> —(Myself and Mine, p. 190.) †

He had grown. Like Emerson, he cared nothing for mere mechanical consistency.

> Do I contradict myself?
> Very well, then, I contradict myself. (p. 78.)

---

* "Walt Whitman," by Wm. Clarke, p. 105. (Macmillan & Co., 1892.)

† All references are to the complete edition of Whitman's works, in two volumes. David McKay, Philadelphia. The simple figures refer to pages in "Leaves of Grass;" those prefixed Pr., to the companion volume of Complete Prose Works.

Besides, the individual need not consciously trouble himself about being consistent. Life will see to it that he be not. Life is change. Remaining the same is but wearing a mask, or it is death. There is, however, a beautiful continuity in every energetic career. You find nothing in it which, when you know the whole, you think might not have been predicted at the outset. Yet it was not, because, as a matter of fact, it could not be foreseen.

No man has given us more self-criticism, probably, of a frank, helpful sort, than Whitman. His large volume of prose is practically a commentary on his poetic work. He shows that, in a sense, he certainly could expound himself. His was no incoherent message. He received it gradually, and gave it as he received it; but nevertheless it constitutes a vital whole.

Avowals of irreconcilable tenets—alternate affirmations and denials, that seem the utterances of some concord transcendentalist, who should have lost his wits, and never gone in search of them to any purpose.*

Had I not committed these words to that terrible Satan, the printed page, I should not believe that I understood Whitman so ill eight years ago.

We have a right to demand that there shall be in the several tenets upheld symptoms at least of a possible reconciliation.

After diligently reading "Leaves of Grass," and constructing an index for ready reference to its contents, I still felt obliged to save the author's sanity by supposing he often did not mean what he said! So difficult is Whitman to some of us when we approach him for the first time!

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* "The Apostle of Chaotism." See Appendix.

I, too, . . . inaugurate a religion,
Each is not for its own sake.
I say the whole earth and all the stars in the sky are for religion's sake.
I say no man has ever yet been half devout enough.
Know you, solely to drop in the earth the germs of a *greater religion*,
The following chants, each for its kind, I sing. (p. 23.)

If Walt Whitman, then, has rightly conceived of his own mission, it is by a consideration of him as a religious teacher that we shall do well to approach his work.

I have arrived
To be wrestled with as I pass for the solid prizes of the universe,
For such I afford whoever can persevere to win them. (p. 27.)

Whoever accepts me, he or she shall be blessed and shall bless me. (p. 123.)

Listen! I will be honest with you.
I do not offer the old, smooth prizes, but offer rough, new prizes. —(p. 126.)

I myself am not one who bestows nothing upon man and woman,
For I bestow upon any man or woman the entrance to all the gifts of the universe. (p. 216.)

Language so definite as this, so tremendous in import, passes beyond all hyperbolic license, unless, indeed, he has a "new religion," a "greater one," to impart. We have a right to ask him for a redemption of promises so amazing, which should he fail to do, one could hardly help but class him among megalomaniacs—with Professor Lombroso.*

Who has read "Specimen Days," and not felt the

* "The Man of Genius," by Cesare Lombroso. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1895. For the construction of the above sentence, I have no apology to offer. Ambiguity is often a merit. *Cf.* p. 45 of Lombroso's book.

loveableness of the man? What beautiful strength and tenderness! His magnetism is irresistible. Then, too, the witness of his friends! What friends! Who was so worshiped by those who knew him? What self-oblivious tenderness and great-hearted enthusiasm did he not elicit? The "*good* gray poet" indeed! It is quite in vain he attempts to repel one. He tries to shock us:

> Walt. Whitman, a Kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
> Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking, and breeding.
> —(p. 48.)

He insinuates doubts:

> Do you suppose you will find in me your ideal?
> Do you suppose yourself advancing on real ground toward a real heroic man?
> Have you no thought, O dreamer, that it may be all maya, illusion? (p. 103.)

It is useless for him to speak of

> The silent manner of me without charm. (p. 105.)

His defiant, rude treatment of us does not discourage us. We still—shocked though we may think ourselves, and angry with him—hear something in us that says, as Emerson is reported to have exclaimed: "What a man!" And we want to know him better, to understand and test his gospel. If it could give us the secret of his great faith in humanity, for instance, we should be well rewarded for much endurance of his bearish buffeting.

But we ask ourselves, what does Walt Whitman mean by religion? Does he not bid us "be not curious about God?" (p. 76.) And what can he mean by driving all the gods from all the heavens like cattle to the crack of his whip—his "barbaric yawp" sounding "over the roofs of the world" (p. 78), into the

shambles of his "egotism," for his "omnivorous lines" (p. 69) to devour? The ordinary reader is horrified at this greedy ogre, who eats gods instead of children! (*Cf.* p. 67.) It is amazing, too,—rather a shock to one's old-fashioned notions,—to have a wedge literally driven with sledge-hammer blows into the compact Trinity to make room for Satan! Is it a whimsical prejudice against the venerable triangle which makes him attempt to forge on his anvil a "square deific?" (p. 339.) One wonders, somewhat irreverently, how Satan feels between God the Son and God the Holy Ghost; whether he thanks the Camden sage for such unforseen promotion to uncomfortable glory from his old "bad eminence" in Milton's epic. But, upon reflection, all such questions turn out to be irrelevant. To Whitman, all these divine names represent no persons. For him, they are

> Eidolons, eidolons, eidolons. (p. 13.)
> Rough deific sketches to fill out better in myself. (p. 67.)

They are

> Outlines I plead for my brothers and sisters. (p. 78.)

In plain terms, they are ideals mankind has proposed to itself for attainment. They have been embodied in myth, anchored in historic personages, precipitated by theologians as dogma in the test tube of unimaginative reason. It is for us to realize what, taken together, they *mean*, namely, a divine revelation of our possibilities, which they were fashioned expressly to hand down from age to age, until men could once more have access for themselves to the kingdom of God within them.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

We must not be daunted by paradox. Let us turn to Whitman's prose to glean a definition of religion, after we have first weighed the significant fact that he was of Quaker descent, and that he thought it worth while to write of Elias Hicks and George Fox as follows:

Doubtless the greatest scientists and theologians will sometimes find themselves saying: "It is not only those who know most who contribute most to God's glory." Doubtless these very scientists at times stand with bared heads before the humblest lives and personalities. For there is something greater (is there not?) than all the science and poems of the world—above all else, like the stars shining eternal—above Shakespeare's plays, or Concord philosophy, or art of Angelo or Raphael, something that shines illusive, like beams of Hesperus at evening—high above all the vaunted wealth and pride—proved by its practical outcropping in life, each case after its own concomitants, the intuitive blending of divine love and faith in a human emotional character—blending for all, for the unlearned, the common, and the poor. (Pr., p. 472.)

What is poor, plain George Fox compared with William Shakespeare—to fancy's lord, imagination's heir? Yet George Fox stands for something, too, a thought, the thought that wakes in silent hours—perhaps the deepest, most eternal thought latent in the human soul. This is the thought of God, merged in the thoughts of moral right, and the immortality of identity. Great, great is this thought—aye, greater than all else, . . . the only certain source of what all are seeking, but few or none find—in it I for myself see the first, the last, the deepest depths and highest heights of art, of literature, and of the purposes of life. I say, whoever labors here, makes contributions here, or, best of all, sets an incarnated example here, of life or death—is dearest to humanity—remains after the rest are gone. And here, for these purposes, and up to the light that was in him, the man Elias Hicks—as the man George Fox had done years before him—lived long, and died, faithful in life, and faithful in death. (Pr., p. 476.)

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I have transcribed these two paragraphs because they are likely to help the perplexed student to a better understanding of Whitman. He can not bear to have abstractions compete for our interest with men and women. Better than any theology is a man. Better than any metaphysical idea of God is a woman. (p. 175.) It is after all the idea of the diety incarnated by avatars in human form (p. 115) that alone seriously interests him.

> He sees eternity in men and women; he does not see men and women as dreams or dots. (p. 270.)

"In the faces of men and women," he sees "God," and in his "own face in the glass." (p. 76.) Every thing is for the soul's sake. To be of worth, it must contribute to the soul. "The universe itself" is merely "a road . . . for traveling souls." (p. 127.)

What then is religion? A state of the soul? What then is God? A vision the soul obtains of itself? According to Whitman, these would be fair definitions. And in these definitions he would not be straying far from Quakerism as he understood it.

> The true Christian religion (such was the teaching of Elias Hicks) consists neither in rites, or bibles, or sermons, or Sundays, but in noiseless, secret ecstasy and unremitted aspiration, in purity, in a good practical life, in charity to the poor and toleration to all. . . . He believed little in church as organized, . . . but he believed always in the Universal Church, in the soul of man, invisibly rapt, ever-waiting, ever-responding to universal truths. (Pr., note, p. 464).*

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* Whitman views religion as essentially unsocial: "I should say, indeed, that only in the perfect uncontamination and solitariness of individuality may the spirituality of religion positively come forth at all. Only here, and on such terms, the mani-

It is the doctrine of "the light within" which constitutes the vital core of Quakerism. Walt Whitman perceives a kinship thus between Fox and Hicks and Plato. It is the same "doctrine that the ideals of character, of justice, of religious action, whenever the highest is at stake, are to be conformed to no outside doctrine of creeds, bibles, legislative enactments, conventionalities, or even decorums, but are to follow the inward deity-planted law of the emotional soul." (Pr., p. 465.) In his prefatory note (Pr., p. 455), he comments on Hicks as "pointing to the fountain of all . . . religion . . . in yourself and your inherent relations." "Others talk of bibles, etc., . . . the canons outside of yourself," . . . but Elias Hicks points "to the religion inside of man's very own nature."

The point at which Walt Whitman takes issue with Elias Hicks is the Quaker's *thorough* exclusive belief in the Hebrew scriptures. Walt Whitman has not restricted himself to them, so that his own religion might be termed a Quakerism cut loose consistently from the last shadow of external authority, not substituting for the Bible any *concensus* even of all the sacred books of the world. Nor is he unappreciative of these. Only he observes:

I do not say they are not divine;
I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still.
It is not they who give the life; it is you who give the life.
Leaves are not more shed from the trees, or trees from the earth, than they are shed from you. —(p. 172.)

---

festations, the devout ecstasy, the soaring flight," etc. The rest of this interesting paragraph is well worth referring to. "Democratic Vistas." (Pr., p. 233.)

If it is possible for the soul to get "passage indeed to primal thought," to its "own clear freshness," to "realms of budding bibles" (p. 320), why should a man any longer "take things at second or third hand," or "look through the eyes of the dead," or "feed on the specters of books?" Why not "filter them from oneself?" (p. 30.) Even the "saviours" are "countless," but only historical or mythical names for "saviours latent within" oneself, where "bibles" "equal to any" can be unclasped and read. (p. 350.) The "outside authority" ought always to enter after the precedence of inside authority. (p. 153.) With such a rigid test as his, "outside authority" in the matter of spiritual beliefs, it is clear there can be none. It is, to be sure, only the old Catholic test, the "*ab omnibus*," which, with the Christian traditionalist, however, always carefully excludes the heretic as though he were non-existent. The appeal was to the universal consensus, but the nature of what the consensus ought to be was so preassumed as to eliminate objectionable factors. With Whitman there is no such *petitio principii*.

> Only what proves itself to every man and woman is so.
> Only what nobody denies is so. (p. 83.)

As for the "inside authority" it is challenged and brought into play by the outside world:

All truths wait in all things. (p. 53).
All truths of the earth continually wait, they are not so concealed either,
They are calm, subtle, intransmissible by print.
They are imbued through all things, conveying themselves willingly,
Conveying a sentiment and invitation. (p. 176.)

The tests of truth are always,

Inner, serene, unapproachable to analysis, in the soul,
Not traditions, not the outer authorities are the judges,
They are the judges of outer authorities and of all traditions.
—(p. 305.)

In fact,

Whatever satisfies souls is true. (p. 201.)

If your soul is diseased it can not be trusted. Yet, again, you would have to trust your soul as to what healthier man should be made your test. For of course arguments do not convince. They usually are excuses the soul furnishes to the mechanical side of itself for entertaining certain convictions. In the last analysis "outside authority" invariably turns out to be "inside authority," more or less arbitrarily attached to some exterior symbol.

How beggarly appear arguments before a defiant deed!
How the floridness of the materials of cities shrivels before a man's or woman's look!
All waits or goes by default till a strong being appears;
A strong being is the proof of the race and of the ability of the universe.
When he or she appears materials are overawed,
The dispute on the soul stops,
The old customs and phrases are confronted, turned back, or laid away. (p. 153.)

Of course the great man can not directly enlighten us, but though "Wisdom can not be passed from one having it to another not having it," though "Wisdom is of the soul, is not susceptible of proof," yet "Something there is in the float of the sight of things that provokes it out of the soul." (p. 123). And no sight is so potent to elicit wisdom from our souls as the sight of the wise man. When in doubt of

my very being, "A morning glory at my window satisfies me more than the metaphysics of books." (p. 39.) More than "a university course," and the learned memories with which it has stored the soul, "A slumbering woman and child convince." (p. 175.)

I see the sleeping babe nestling the breast of its mother,
The sleeping mother and babe hushed, I study them long and long. (p. 217.)

And the last resort always will be to the touch of a loving hand. All "the terrible doubt of appearances" is answered:

When he whom I love travels with me or sits a long while holding me by the hand,
When the subtle air, the impalpable, the sense that words and reason hold not, surround us and pervade us,
Then I am charged with untold and untellable wisdom, I am silent, I require nothing further,
I can not answer the question of appearances or that of identity beyond the grave,
But I walk or sit indifferent, I am satisfied,
He ahold of my hand has completely satisfied me. (p. 175.)

Who that has been with his fellow-men in their sorest need has not found that all one man can do for another is to be himself strong, convinced, patient, and to press the sick or dying doubter's hand tenderly?

Considering, however, the extent to which he carries out all its implications, we ought not to be amazed when we find Walt Whitman's doctrines of the inner light admitting of companions from lands and literatures strange to Christendom. The doctrine of a spiritual body of St. Paul of Tarsus, Emanuel Swedenborg, and William Blake hobnobs goodnaturedly with a metempsychosis doctrine definitely

indicated; while a doctrine of cosmic cycles faintly looms up in the distance; and Vedantic views are at times expressed with such originality and energy as to have brought a smile of delight to the serene immobile countenance of a Hindu friend, to whom I read them.

The negative and positive poles, as it were, of Whitman's current of religion can be pointed out now in his own words. On the one hand we have the "divine pride of a man in himself—the radical foundation of the new religion" (Pr., p. 246); on the other hand "religious" is defined to mean "possessing the idea of the infinite." (Pr., p. 238.) The true thing itself, strictly speaking, is neither, but their union:

> Yet I in this dull scene . . . why am I so (almost) happy here and alone? Why would any intrusion even from people I like spoil the charm? But am I alone? Doubtless there comes a time—perhaps it has come to me—when one feels through his whole being, and pronouncedly in the emotional part, that identity between himself subjectively and nature objectively which Schelling and Fichte are so fond of pressing. How it is, I know not, but I often realize a presence here—in clear moods I am certain of it (Pr., p. 105).

Some "vital unseen presence" (Pr., p. 99) haunts for us cold nature—a ghost maybe of ourself. "The victorious fusion" in man "of the Real and Ideal," which the poet sets forth, is Religion. (Pr., p. 398.)

But Walt Whitman puts the matter, I conceive, once more in different terms:

> Great—unspeakably great—is the Will! the free Soul of man. (Pr., p. 336.)
>
> Something that fully satisfies—that something is the All, and the idea of the All, etc. (Pr., p. 253.) I have the idea of all, and am all, and believe in all. (p. 192.)

"The eternal soul of man" (Pr., p. 286) is to be saved—freed—by union with this "Idea of the All." "Liberty," he tells us is not "release from all law."

> The wise see in it, on the contrary, the potent Law of Laws, namely, the fusion and combination of the conscious will, or partial individual law, with those universal, eternal unconscious ones which run through all Time, pervade history, prove immortality, give moral purpose to the entire objective world, and the last dignity to human life. (Pr., p. 337.)

The whole matter is restated in a note to his essay, "Poetry To-day in America." (Pr., p. 299.) The "conscious will" is to be reconciled to the "great unconscious and abysmic second will." The soul is to "cheerfully range itself under universal laws, and embody them."

But unfamiliar with oriental speculations, or not possessing a sure grasp of the principle of "inner light" and what it logically leads to (particularly as the Friends never followed it out to the end, restrained, unconsciously by the language of Christian theological tradition), there may be those who find it difficult to represent to themselves the position of Whitman. Another method of approach may perhaps serve them in good stead. I shall allow myself, therefore, a brief abstract disquisition, with no intent of converting them to Whitman, or any notion of stating personal views.

There are the great ecstatic moments of the soul. Strange moments! * To some they have come in nature, to others "at a meeting;" to some from an idea, to others from an ideal; to some meditating on scien-

* *Cf.* Emerson's Essay on the "Over Soul."

tific law, to others in poetic dreams; to some during metaphysical speculations, to others when confronted with a living character. In every instance, however, the rapture was of the same nature. The soul became fluid feeling, and embraced the visible universe as the ocean would an island; and now the man has ebbed back to his ordinary self, the old indefinite extent of conscious feeling at ecstatic high tide is thought to exist, apart from him, centered outside of him. There arises thus a painful sense of the gap between the self of ecstasy and the self of ordinary thought and feeling. Having once experienced the blissful obliteration of all hostility to the soul, the momentary swallowing up of all that claims to be independent of the soul by the soul, one can never again be rid of hunger and thirst for the renewal of the experience at least in some degree. All beautiful arts, all religious organizations, are separate efforts to accomplish this. Those with whom these means are invariably successful, let an overflow of gratitude glorify them. They praise with enthusiasm statue, picture, symphony, society, creed. The experience thus tends to become all the more readily an empty tradition. Those who have not had it very naturally suppose that the works of art or the theological doctrines and ecclesiastical rites are in themselves the end, instead of mere means to this spiritual ecstasy. Occasionally such formalists stumble on the true meaning of the doctrines they have received. More often are men initiated by extreme sorrows and despairs. Then they wonder they could have so long handled holy things without the knowledge of their true purpose, when, after all,

they bear the stamp of it so plainly upon them for him who has eyes and sees.

Now, one reason so few understand this mystic secret of religion according to this exposition, is the difficulty of suggesting it by any word. Lay the stress on the ordinary state of man—the so-called real, or actual—more properly termed the apparent, and the obvious danger is that we shall consider the so-called Ideal (more properly the Real) as a god, infinitely different from us; and then, passing by use of language to anthropomorphism—the difference will be construed as a quarrel:—a sin on our part and a wrath on his. Atonement in order to Communion, becomes then easily a reconciliation through external mediators and through sacrifices—the teachers being the historic basis for the former, their sufferings or the hardships necessary to attainment of the Ideal, giving an objective or subjective rationale to the latter. Of such a nature, it may be argued, are all exoteric religions. The esoteric side of every religion, however, lays the stress, not on the apparent, but the Real. The mystic turns his eyes inward. He can not gaze upon the real core of his own being. That phantom-self vanishes as he approaches, until the mystery is nameless, awful, infinite. So he recognizes in the unfathomable abyss within, the self of hours of ecstacy. He may call it "God," adopt all the language of his unmystical brethren, but for him it has a new significance. Whether he adopts or not their terms he knows it as Self. The danger, however, appears very soon. To communicate his meaning is well-nigh impossible. In all probability the

uninitiated who accepts the mystic as his authority deludes himself, anticipates results, and progress is paralyzed. He thinks there is nothing to do. Because he knows the divine is the Real in him, he takes no pains to transform the apparent, actual man. He gives the flesh, maybe the full license of the spirit, and is immoral on the pretext of being above morality. The dualist, emphasizer of the apparent, becomes contrariwise in all probability, if he be in earnest, a chastiser of himself. Thus antinomianism and asceticism are the two penalties men pay for embracing either horn of the dilemma, and misunderstanding the true meaning :—a God without—viewed as separate, hostile, to be reconciled by self-imposed hardships; a God within—viewed as really at one with the worshiper, and therefore the premature assumption of divine freedom! Many Mystics strive to overcome the difficulty by using both lines of expression alternately, and thus, by oscillation between extremes, to indicate what they believe to be the true mean.

Now, Walt Whitman prefers to speak of the potential as actual, to call God, Self, as a rule; though he tries to obviate misconstructions by occasional use of other language, and a constant emphasis on the thought of growth or the Hegelian "becoming." Change is a death and a birth. What is must cease to be in order that what is to be may come into being. We have had talk of "death unto the flesh," and "birth from above," with equivalent phrases, more or less understood, for now nineteen centuries. Whitman prefers to use the conception of evolution or growth instead of those

two terms which together express the same thought. He uses the word "death" to indicate the unknown life. He adds often the adjective "heavenly," lest he be misunderstood to mean by "death" the dissolution of the body or of the soul. Yet, in spite of every effort to be clear, he is steadily misunderstood by most readers for years, unless they have chanced to study the Idealist philosophers of Germany, the Mystics of Christian centuries, the Neoplatonists, or, better yet, for interpreting Emerson and Whitman, the Bhagavad Gita.

DIVINE PRIDE.

Let us consider, now, first, what Whitman calls "the radical foundation of the new religion:" the "divine pride in one's self." His last words of criticism upon this point will be found in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads." (Appendix to Leaves of Grass, p. 435.)

"I think this pride indispensable to an American. I think it not inconsistent with obedience, humanity, deference, and self-questioning."

It is no more than fair to accept his own definition of terms. Whatever would be wholly inconsistent with these states of mind and heart is then not what Whitman means by "pride." One is free, no doubt, to reprehend his use of the word. Perhaps, however, it will not be so easy to find a less objectionable term.

And here, in considering the attitude Whitman takes toward his present undeveloped self because of its great, unspeakable destiny, we can not too forcibly remind ourselves that he does not say these things of

himself as other than us; that he really means to put them in our mouths:

I will effuse egotism and show it underlying all. (p. 24.)

I celebrate myself and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume. (p. 29.)

All I mark as my own you shall offset it with your own,
Else it were time lost listening to me. (p. 44.)

It is you talking just as much as myself; I act as the tongue of you,
Tied in your mouth, in mine it begins to be loosened. (p. 75.)

I know perfectly well my own egotism,
Know my omnivorous lines and must not write any less,
And would fetch you whoever you are flush with myself. (p. 69.)

He hints that in the "Answerer," or Maker of Ideals, men ought not to, and do not, revere another, whatever they may fancy:

Him they accept, in him lave, in him perceive themselves as amid light. (p. 134.)

If not, how could the "Answerer" or Messiah be of use to men?

And, finally, in order that his object in singing himself may be clear to all, he uses the pronoun "you" in the following lines, as well as in the glorious poem, "To You:" (p. 186.)

Whoever you are! motion and reflection are especially for you,
The divine ships sail the divine sea for you.
Whoever you are! you are he or she for whom the earth is solid and liquid;
You are he or she for whom the sun and moon hang in the sky,
For none more than you are the present and the past,
For none more than you is immortality.
Each man to himself and each woman to herself is the word of the past and the present, and the true word of immortality;

No one can acquire for another—not one,
Not one can grow for another—not one, . . .
And no man understands any greatness or goodness but his own,
or the indication of his own. (p. 178.)

Let no reader, then, be any more disturbed by Lombrosian qualms at Whitman's supposed "Megalomania." The very essence of the disease is absurd exaltation of oneself at the expense of one's neighbor; while Whitman's egotism is displayed only to engender the like in his reader, which, whatever one may think of it, is quite a different thing. Nevertheless, the manner of Walt Whitman is so frankly arrogant, he urges such extraordinary claims for us, that many a beginner insists on not taking him at his word and on supposing he meant all these vast attributes and defiant attitudes to be descriptive only of his private personality! On this point, at the risk of being tedious, one can not lay too much stress. Standing at the grave of Emerson, Whitman uttered these words: *

A just man, poised on himself, all-loving, all inclosing and sane and clear as the sun. Nor does it seem so much Emerson himself we are here to honor—it is conscience, simplicity, culture, humanity's attributes at their best, yet applicable, if need be, to average affairs, and eligible to all. (Pr., p. 197.)

Elsewhere in a very interesting critique on Emerson, he says of him:

His final influence is to make his students cease to worship any thing—*almost* cease to believe in any thing outside of themselves. (Pr., p. 320.)

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* Whether actually *spoken*, I do not know.

Now, Whitman would not have us do this "almost," but altogether:—

> You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
> You shall listen to all sides and filter them for yourself. (p. 30.)

What were the advantage cutting us loose from all glorious traditions, if he should, in his turn, become one himself, and repress our development from within, which he held as the one law of sterling manhood?

> Not I, nor any one else, can travel that road for you,
> You must travel it for yourself. (p. 73.)

Besides, he definitely teaches "straying from himself:" (p. 75.)

> Each singing what belongs to him or her and to no one else.
> —(p. 17.)

And he puts it very unmistakably in fourteen lines, using the figure of the "teacher of athletes," which end:—

> He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher. (p. 74.)

In this matter surely he has been less of an egotist than most men of genius. Only now and then does he refer to himself as a separate person from the reader, and then it is modestly, sometimes pathetically (*e. g.*, "As I ebbed with the Ocean of Life."—Stanza 2, p. 202). "Every great character," Whitman observes (writing of Elias Hicks), is "adjusted strictly with reference to itself." (Pr., p. 472.) The great lesson of nature is poise, self-sufficiency, appropriation from without only of what can be subordinated to the life

that makes us grow from within, and so, assimilated:—

> I will confront these shows of the day and night,
> I will know if I am to be less than they,
> I will see if I am not as majestic as they,
> I will see if I am not as subtle and real as they,
> I will see if I am to be less generous than they,
> I will see if I have no meaning, while the houses and ships have meaning,
> I will see if the fishes and birds are to be enough for themselves, and I am not to be enough for myself. (p. 275.)

Unconscious contact with "serene moving animals teaching content" and "the primal sanities of nature" (p. 244), is the reason that

> The secret of the making of the best persons,
> Is to grow in the open air, and to eat and sleep with the earth.
> —(p. 123.)

On this account, his "Leaves of Grass" lies "unborn or dead" in libraries. (p. 98.) It is not so much that he refuses to "translate" himself, "except in the open air" (p. 75), but that the seclusion between the four walls makes for the ordinary reader any expansive "divine pride" difficult; and not merely in the case of architecture or music, but in that of every art whatsoever, in the last analysis, as he tells us:

> All . . . is what you do to it when you look upon it.
> All . . . is what awakes from you. . . . (p. 173; cf. p. 282.)*

But he who contemplates the continence of vegetables, birds, animals, can not but feel with Whitman

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* For the open air, therefore, as a test of literary worth, *cf.* Pr. 199 and 501, with p. 433 in "Leaves of Grass."

The consequent meanness of me should I skulk, or find myself indecent, while birds or animals never once skulk or find themselves indecent. (p. 91.)

Elsewhere, again, in his grim way, he makes us laugh at the proud "Lord of Nature," so called:—

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contained,
I stand and look at them long and long.
They do not sweat and whine about their condition. . . .
Not one is respectable or happy over the whole earth. (p. 54.)

Consequently—he continues the thought elsewhere,—

I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood,
I see that the elementary laws never apologize.
I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by, after all. (p. 45.)

And I say to any man or woman, let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes. (p. 76.)

If ever Whitman is sublime, it is when he chants this self-centered "spiritual manhood poised" on itself, "giving, not taking law." (p. 167.)

The joy of manly selfhood!
To be servile to none, to defer to none, not to any tyrant known or unknown,
To walk with erect carriage, a step springy and elastic,
To look with calm gaze or with a flashing eye,
To speak with a full and sonorous voice out of a broad chest,
To confront with your personality all the other personalities of the earth. (p. 146.)

O, while I live, to be the ruler of life, not a slave,
To meet life as a powerful conqueror,
No fumes, no ennui, no more complaints or scornful criticisms,
To these proud laws of the air, the water and the ground, proving my soul impregnable,
And nothing exterior shall ever take command of me. (p. 147.)

O to be self-balanced for contingencies,
To confront night, storms, hunger, ridicule, accidents, rebuffs,
as the trees and animals do. (p. 16.)

"Why should I pray? Why should I venerate and be ceremonious?" asks Whitman. (p. 44.) Yet communion of the soul with God within is the very end and aim of life. None has framed a nobler prayer than that he has put into the mouth of Columbus. (p. 323). Nor does Whitman fail to follow the maxim of Rossetti in Soothsay:

To God at best, to chance at worst,
Give thanks for good things, last as first.

He is always overflowing with gratitude and love. His prose is full of praise and thanksgiving and usually we feel that it goes—as "at best" it should—to God. (p. 398).

But the real questions for the disturbed reader of Whitman to ask himself would be, "what really is worship?" and "what is worship for?" The purpose of uttered worship is relief to the soul which can not any longer endure the pressure of pent adoration. It is to uplift the soul, not in any sense to confer a favor on its god. And the purpose of worship defines its true nature. Not the cries of "Lord, Lord" (Lk. vi, 46; Matt. vii, 21–23), but the doing of the will is the main ingredient. How idolatrous we are it is not easy for a mind unused to watching its own motions fully to realize. Have you rid yourself of "idols made with hands?" Well, so far, so good. Have you wholly rid yourself of idols made by the imagination? If not, then you are worshiping disembodied idols, ghosts of idols. Is it so wise to

decry idolatry, when perhaps you shall find one man only in a million really able to worship God in his unrepresented Being? Would not such worship be practically atheistic for all but that extremely small number who can understand that what most utterly eludes all thought is the most real?

To Whitman, of course, God is Subject of subject, Object of object. Behind yourself is God. Behind the universe is God. You and the universe are the two-fold veil of the One. True worship is worship of that One. Obedience to the Maker is being yourself. To be real is the best homage to Reality. If there is to be worship, it will be beyond words—or it will pass through one of the two symbols—(yourself and the universe)—or through both at one and the same time. Such verbal identification of the One with these is unsatisfactory. Yet, so long as the One Reality passes our thought, because thought invariably analyzes being into subject and predicate (as Plotinus long ago showed), we must not speak of It at all, or be content to give It in terms of that which we expressly say It is not. Nor is such language improper. Even if we are to realize in "ecstacy" the nature of this "Reality," we shall have to pass beyond thought through some such inadequate self-contradictory thought of the Unthinkable.

Whitman in his prefaces to Leaves of Grass for 1855 to 1872 and 1876 fully enough expounds his ideas on the subject of the poet and his office, and the aims of his own performance. To give a provisional body to the Spirit of religion until it be incarnate fully in men and women—readers of such poetry—is the highest duty of the poet. (*Cf.* Pr. 272–279.)

It was originally my intention, after chanting in "Leaves of Grass," the songs of the body and existence, to then compose a further equally needed volume, based on those convictions of perpetuity and conservation which, enveloping all precedents, *make the unseen soul govern absolutely at the last.* I meant while in a sort continuing the theme of my first chants, to shift the slides and exhibit the problem and paradox of the same ardent and fully appointed personality entering the sphere of the resistless gravitation of spiritual law, and with cheerful face estimating death, not at all as the cessation, but as somehow what I feel it must be, the entrance upon by far the greatest part of existence, and something that life is at least as much for as it is for itself. But the full construction of such a work is beyond my powers, and must remain for some bard in the future. *The physical and the sensuous, in themselves or their immediate continuations, retain holds upon me which I think are never entirely released; and those holds I have not only not denied, but hardly wish to weaken.* (Pr., p. 281; *Cf.* footnote, Pr., p. 284.)

This paragraph I transcribe, because it ought to prevent us seeking in Whitman's work what he does not profess to furnish. The highest rapture which he conceives possible is denied him. Greater poets and prophets are to come than those that have been. In the domain of the very highest, he feels his unfitness for a sufficiently bold flight.

> Over the mountain growths—disease and sorrow,—
> An uncaught bird is ever hovering, hovering,
> High in the purer, happier air.
>
> From imperfection's murkiest cloud,
> Darts always forth one ray of perfect light,
> One flash of heaven's glory. (p. 182.)

"A soul-sight of that divine clue" (Pr., p. 174) is vouchsafed him, "a guiding thread so fine along the mighty labyrinth." It is "belief in the plan" of God, "inclosed in time and space—health, peace, salvation

universal." (p. 182.) You may retort: "This is vague." Nevertheless, Whitman may be right when he says: "The faintest indication is the indication of the best,— and then, becomes the clearest indication." (Pr., p. 267.)

> Is it a dream?
> Nay, but the lack of it the dream,
> And failing it, life's lore and wealth a dream,
> And all the world a dream. (p. 183.)

If, in the superb "Song of the Universal," he is breathless with the burden of the Spirit of God, in the allegory of "the Passage to India," which he expressly declares to be a sort of last word (Pr., foot-note, p. 280), he makes his intentions clear enough:

> Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
> At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,
> But that I, turning, call to thee, O Soul, thou actual Me,
> And lo, thou gently masterest orbs,
> Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
> And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of Space. (p. 321.)

If the strain is great, it is because there is no effort to hide behind words or rites:

> Ah more than any priest O Soul, we too believe in God,
> But with the mystery of God we dare not dally.
> Bathe me, O God, in thee, mounting to thee,
> I and my soul to range in range of Thee. (p. 321.)

> I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own. (p. 32.)

> Reckoning ahead O Soul, when thou, the time achieved,
> The seas all crossed, weathered the capes, the voyage done,
> Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attained,
> As, filled with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found,
> The Younger melts in fondness in his arms. (p. 322.)

More definite utterance it was impossible for Whitman to give his thought. So long as there is

consciousness of God as separate and distinct, communion is not entire; when it is entire, self merges with Self, the younger brother and the Elder Brother pass away, and the One alone is.

WORSHIP.

In the close of the magnificent poem just quoted from, Whitman describes the Absolute as the "you" of waters, woods, mountains, prairies, clouds, suns and stars. Idolatry is always the refuge of wing-weary aspirants.

> My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,
> The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms,
> The great Comerado, the lover true for whom I pine, will be there. (p. 73.)

Then why strive to anticipate? Visions of Him would be premature, and, maybe, if over-distinct, injurious to progress in the Soul's consolidation for an eternal identity aware of itself in God. Let symbols suffice for the present! His "Gods" are various names of the One. (p. 213.) The divine Lover, the Ideal Man, Death, the Best Idea, historic heroisms, Time, Space, the Earth, the Sun, the Stars. But of such Gods, or symbols of God, there is none "more divine than yourself." (p. 299.) None more than the "other gods, these men and women I love." (p. 375.) Besides, it is clear, no symbol is so significant as one's own being if "nothing is greater to one than one's self is" (p. 76), particularly if the thought of God as other than the Reality of you, is the thought of something beyond knowledge and intuition. "The unseen is proved by the seen" (p. 31), and the body is

symbol of the soul. It is so much of the soul as we perceive through the senses. Therefore, if you persist in asking what he worships, he answers:

> If I worship one thing *more than another*, it shall be the spread of
> my own body; (p. 49.)

and he will not shrink from a complete delight in it—that most eloquent word, if "things" be indeed as Whitman conceives, "words of God." (*Cf.* p. 176.)

> I dote on myself, there is that lot of me and all so luscious,
> Each moment and whatever happens thrills me with joy. (p. 49.)

Nor is this worship of the body so alien to his main purpose as it might seem. It is not mere defiance. If true worship of the Divine is to make the self realize its dignity as that which proceeds from It, expresses It, goes to It; and if the body is for us, most of the time, the hieroglyph for self and soul; it is of paramount importance to realize the greatness, the beauty, the sacred nature of the body. "Temple of the Holy Ghost" we have been taught to call it, but thanks to a strange eclipse of much of its glory by conventional clothes, we shrink unconsciously from representing ourselves the whole, sound, perfectly developed body as athrill with God. Yet, "If any *thing* is sacred, the human body is sacred." (p. 86.) And Whitman means to rescue for himself his entire body from any indignities placed upon it in ages of ignorance or impiety. "The expression of a well made man appears not only in his face." (p. 81.) "In any man or woman, a clean, strong, firm-fibered body is more beautiful than the most beautiful face." (p. 86.)

Who will venture to praise the folds of drapery

as more graceful and modest than the play of muscle and sinew? Not alone the marbles of ancient Greece shall have the right to a glorious nudity. In his Prose we are supplied with a complete commentary on this, to many adverse critics, the most objectionable part of Whitman's work.

> Sweet, sane, still Nakedness in Nature!—ah, if poor, sick, purient humanity in cities might really know you once more! Is not nakedness then indecent? No, not inherently. It is your thought, your sophistication, your fear, your respectability, that is indecent. There come moods when these clothes of ours are not only too irksome to wear, but are themselves indecent. (p. 104.)

An entire essay in his Collect is devoted to this subject and makes his position at all events quite intelligible. (Pr., p. 302–306.) "To the pure all things," of course, "are pure," and when God made man he ventured to think his work all "very good." The poet surely has a right to adopt God's point of view, and if he does not, who shall?

> I swear the earth shall surely be complete to him or her who shall be complete,
> The earth remains jagged and broken only to him or her who remains jagged and broken. (p. 179.)

> Old as the world is and beyond statement as are the countless and splendid results of its culture and evolution, perhaps the best, and earliest, and purest intuitions of the human race have yet to be developed. (Pr. p. 306.)

These rudimentary convictions it is the poet's special business to bring into full consciousness. The bird is not only singing for his mate, but also for the eggs she covers with ruffled feathers. (p. 24.) One of those rudimentary convictions is the sacredness of the unadorned body. Still why,

"If I worship one thing *more* than another"

must it be the body? Because it is the one *thing* that is really mine, the worship of which exalts me, and implies a worship still more devout of that which can not be called a "thing," namely, "Me," who dwell in it.

But there are doubtless some who do not yet understand. They will urge: "Is there no greater body than your body? Is there no greater soul than your soul? Why not prefer to worship an Apollo Belvedere? Why not bow, if bow you must, to the soul of Plato? Surely here are more adequate symbols—better idols!" Whitman would answer:

After all these are only to me ideas. If that which these ideas connote be greater in fact to another impartial person than my body and my soul, which are to him also mere ideas, they are not so to me. For him they are comparable. For me they are not. My body is something more to me than the best idea of a body. My soul is something more to me than the loftiest notion I can form of a soul. Even could I institute a comparison and realize the superiority, I should not on that account necessarily prefer Apollo and Plato as symbols of the Divine. "The seed perfection" nestles safely inclosed in every being (p. 181), and after all "size is only development." (p. 45.) "Any thing is but a part." (p. 73.) Only the whole is *really* divine. Each thing in its place is equally fit as symbol of that whole.

I do not call the tortoise unworthy because she is not something else. (p. 38.)

I do not call one greater and one smaller,
That which fills its period and place is equal to any. (p. 71.)

Each of us inevitable,

Each of us limitless—each of us with his or her right upon the earth,
Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of the earth,
Each of us here as divinely as any is here. (p. 119.)

After all, when we look out upon the world, it is a fact that all lines converge to the eye. You may deplore this if you choose. You may argue from the fact that others perceive the same phenomenon, that it is an evident illusion. Yet, as long as you wish to paint this world, you will have to accept this optic egotism as a fundamental fact of *our* world. Else what you paint will be untrue to the only experience we have of the landscape.

Have you thought there could be but a single supreme?
There can be any number of supremes—one does not countervail another any more than one eyesight countervails another, or one life countervails another.
All is eligible to all,
All is for individuals, all is for you,
No condition is prohibited, not God's or any.
All comes by the body, only health puts one rapport with the universe. (p. 264.)

If this egotism be charged against us as crime, we can but say:

The universe is duly in order; every thing is in its place. —(p. 331.)

and clearly,

I stand in my place with my own day here. (p. 20.)

If the past and its names interests me, how much more would this my present and I interest the men of old?

I sat studying at the feet of the great masters.
Now, if eligible, O that the great masters might return and study me. (p. 20.)

I know that the past was great and the future will be great,
And I know that both curiously conjoint in the present time.
—(p. 193.)

As the corpse was fittest for its days, the heir is fittest now for his. (p. 266.) Let me "exalt the present and the real." (p. 162.)

Immense have been the preparations for me . . .
All forces have been steadily employed to complete and delight me.
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul. (p. 72.)

In literature, we may have supposed we could avoid this egocentric perspective. Thought we fancied is impersonal. But only the infinite circle has no center—or has its center every-where, which amounts to the same—and the mind can not inclose the infinite. It can "drown itself" in such a thought as Leopardi so well put it. If the soul is to realize its thought, set its affections upon it, make of the idea an ideal, the radius must be finite, and then, of course, every thing once more groups itself about you. As Whitman expressed it, "even for the treatment of the universal, in politics, metaphysics, or any thing, sooner or later we come down to one single, solitary soul." (Pr., p. 229.) To give full expression to this truth was the "Song of Myself" written.

Where I am . . . there is the center of all, there is the meaning of all. (p. 193.)

The true nature of things I do not penetrate. Nothing is transparent.

We fathom you not, we love you. . . .
You furnish your parts toward the soul. (p. 134.)

Things are "only inaudable words." (p. 176.) They "express me better than I can express myself."

(p. 122.) The whole world-show is but "myself disintegrated" (p. 129); a spectrum, analysis, so to speak, of my soul. If I wish to contemplate myself, I must "absorb all" the sights of the cities "to myself." (p. 38.) They

> Tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
> And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
> And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.
>
> —(p. 41.)

All the "shows of Day and Night," "I absorb all in myself, and become master myself." (p. 275.) All history "tastes good and becomes mine." (p. 59.) Even the civil war of the early sixties serves me best by illustrating the "vehement struggle . . . for unity in one's self." (p. 373.)

Apart from my view of them, "solid things" only "stand for realities." In that sense, too, they are words—not merely mirrors of myself.

> Have you ever reckoned that the landscape took substance and form that it might be painted in a picture? (p. 172.)

Things, however, while not transparent, are at least dimly translucent, and the Real, that filters through them, if it be the same Real that shines through me, I may well call it by the same name. I have then a right—a reasonable right—to identify myself with things, not merely with my sensations and notions of them, but with what they are.

> Underneath all to me is myself, to you yourself. (p. 274.)
>
> One's self must never give way—that is the final substance that out of all is sure. . . .
>
> When shows break up, what but One's Self is sure? (p. 342.)

The proper use of things, then, to which the poet (and according to Whitman he is every man) is bound

to be "faithful" (p. 271) is to "enter by them to an area" fit for the self's "dwelling" (p. 47), "taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond them." (p. 197.) For the business of the soul is growth—growth from within. My business is but to "extricate" myself out of myself. (p. 351.)

My real self has yet to come forth,
It shall yet march forth o'ermastering, till all lies beneath me,
It shall yet stand up the soldier of ultimate victory. (p. 364.)

If for this I need the outer world of symbol why expend energy on seeking the rare and extraordinary?

You surely come back at last,
In things best known to you finding the best. (p. 175.)

Because after all

What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is Me,
Me going in for my chances, spending for vast returns,
Adorning myself to bestow myself on the first that will take me,
Not asking the sky to come down to my good will,
Scattering it freely, forever. (p. 39.)

Rare and extraordinary things indeed might overawe me, I might forget that I was really master. In the magnitude and novelty of my experience, perhaps, some rival to my soul would lurk. My ideal is not Nelson, then, or Socrates, or Newton, or any greater name of saint or god, but myself, endowed with their perfections. Let us openly avow this to our souls; repeat it again and again till we are in no danger of deceiving ourselves at any time on this subject. Let us not pretend to see otherwise than our eyes permit. Let us wait to speak impersonally till we have passed to a higher plane of consciousness, that shall be impersonal. Let us boldly paint all our ideal pictures with the lines converging with "reference to the soul" (p. 351) for me, mine, for you, yours.

Such is the substance of Whitman's teaching. Not only is all knowledge of ours subjective, but (clear to the eye of faith) the real Object is identical with the real Subject, so that the terms "I" and "It," "One's Self" and "God" are convertible.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL.

It becomes incumbent on us now to investigate the practical corollaries of the propositions philosophic and theological which we have hitherto considered.

It is with some hesitation indeed that I approach this part of my exposition, as it will be far less easy than elsewhere to make Walt. Whitman speak for himself, and in speaking for him there is liable to enter a hardly calculable personal factor. All the guidance we have is in the hypothesis that his own unexpressed view reconciled all his self-contradictions and paradoxes. For is there not in the very tone of the already quoted lines, "Very well, then, I contradict myself," something which might suggest rather a concession for argument's sake than an actual plea of guilty to any charge of reckless inconsistency? If evil is declared at one time non-existent, at another time part of the Divine, evil must bear two senses, or we should have to conclude that the Divine itself is non-existent. The tangle is by no means easy for the reader of Whitman to ravel. But the critic is obliged to attempt this. We might, perhaps, out of sheer despair, have set the whole matter of morality aside, as we do with Keats' poetry, were it not that Whitman so clearly in his prose arrogates for himself a moral purpose. He tells us that "all great art must have an ethic purpose." (Pr., p. 188.) To be sure,

he warns us in his preface of 1885 that "the greatest poet does not moralize or make applications of morals, he knows the soul." (Pr., p. 267.) But as long as Religion and Ethics are inseparable (works being the fruit of a living flower of faith), and that he boldly claims to "inaugurate a religion," one can not evade the question altogether. It is interesting also to note by the way Whitman's criticism of J. F. Millet's picture, which may have suggested to Mr. Havelock Ellis his helpful comparison of Whitman and Millet.*

> Besides this masterpiece ("The First Sower") there were many others, (I shall never forget the simple evening scene, "Watering the Cow,"), all inimitable, all perfect as pictures, works of mere art; and then it seemed to me, with that last *impalpable ethic purpose* from the artist (most likely unconscious to himself) *which I am always looking for*. (Pr., p. 181.)

But that Whitman was not indifferent as to the moral effect of his work, is put beyond all dispute by the note to his Preface of 1876, a paragraph of which shall be quoted:

> Since I have been ill (1873-74-75), mostly without serious pain, and with plenty of time and frequent inclination to judge my poems (never composed with an eye on the book market, nor for fame, nor for any pecuniary profit), I have felt temporary depression more than once, for fear that in "Leaves of Grass" the *moral* parts were not sufficiently pronounced. But in my clearest and calmest moods I have realized that as those "Leaves," all and several, surely prepare a way for and necessitate morals, and are adjusted to them, just the same as nature does and is, they are what, consistently with my plan they must and probably should be. (In a certain sense, while the Moral is the purport and last intelligence of all Nature, there is absolutely nothing of the moral in the works, or laws, or shows of Nature. Those only lead inevitably to it—begin and necessitate it.) (Pr., p. 284.)

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* The New Spirit, by Havelock Ellis. Walter Scott. London, pages 104-107, a very suggestive little volume of essays.

According to Whitman's own judgment, it will be impossible to extract a little treatise on morals, and difficult to obtain a systematic solution of the problem of evil, from his poems.

There are those who nowadays venture to claim that without evil there can be for man no good. Therefore, as they would perpetuate the consciously moral in man, they find themselves obliged to contemplate an eternity of evil, at least of a subjective sort. There must always remain in the mind, even should it pass out of the being, that which is different from good, if there is to be consciousness of good! There must always remain in the world of experience the painful, obstructive, and dangerous, in order that there may be opportunity for the display of will! To this view Whitman does not seem to accord much sympathy. I suppose he would have argued that it was, in the first place, not at all necessary that we should remain consciously moral.

> I give nothing as duties,
> What others give as duties, I give as living impulses,
> (Shall I give the heart's action as a duty?) (p. 190.)

If the figure is to be taken strictly, he would rather have morality relegated to the subconscious sphere of life. Perfect health involves oblivion of the body as a functioning organism. The soul, when complete in ideal efficiency, knows of no obligation, the "ought" having become the "is." For any thing that looks like dualism, we have a sharp reproof. It is puerile, and absurd :—

> Silent and amazed even when a little boy,
> I remember I heard the preacher every Sunday put God in his statements

As contending against some being or influence. (p. 217.)*

He sets down his disagreement with such views as I have occasionally heard ascribed to him by apparently conscientious readers of "Leaves of Grass," and which have been stated above.

Roaming in thought over the Universe, I saw the little that is good steadily hastening toward immortality,
And the vast all that is called Evil I saw hastening to merge itself and become lost and dead. (p. 216.)

Only the good is universal. (p. 181.)

Whitman summarizes with evident approval what he believes to be the views of Hegel on this subject:—

The specious, the unjust, the cruel, and what is called the unnatural, though not only permitted in a certain sense (like shade to light), inevitable in the divine scheme, are by the whole constitution of that scheme, partial, inconsistent, temporary, and though having ever so great an ostensible majority, are certainly destined to failure, after causing much suffering. (Pr., p. 176.)

To mere "optimism," explaining "only the surface and fringe" (Pr., p. 174), he has no leaning. He desires always to see things as they really seem to the eye. The "divine cue," of which he claims a "soul sight," is the thought that "the whole congeries of things" is "like a leashed dog in the hand of the hunter" (Pr., p. 174); "that there is central and never broken unity" and one "consistent and eternal purpose." (Pr., p. 176.) The notion that there is any thing inherently evil or foul in the universe seems to him "to impugn Creation" (Pr., p. 306), God "seeing no evil" in it. (*Cf.* Hab. i, 13.) When he tells us that

* *Cf.* Pr., p. 270.

The difference between sin and goodness is no delusion, (p. 335.)

he must doubtless have in mind a conception somewhat akin to this of Browning:

The evil is null, is naught, is silence, implying sound;
What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more.
—(Abt. Vogeler. St. IX, l. 6.)

Growth from good to better is quite sufficient to allow of the full exercise of the will. Evil thus becomes merely the name of a good that has been transcended.

The soul is always beautiful, it appears more or it appears less, it comes or it lags behind. (p. 331.)

Nothing out of its place is good, nothing in its place is bad.
—(p. 269.)

The universe is duly in order, every thing is in its place. (p. 331.)

By this is meant, then, that, while in the universe absolute law and order obtains, and the whole therefore is good, yet the individual can occupy divers places in this whole, and if it prefer to occupy a lower one than it might occupy, embodied as it now is, it is bad with reference to its possibilities—it has yet to grow.

The fundamental difficulty about this evolutionary conception of "Evil" as propounded by some oriental theosophies would seem to lie in the postulation of a universe infinite and perfect, giving their strict sense to these words infinite and perfect. To speak of progress with reference to a whole, felt to be thus infinite and perfect, is sufficiently meaningless. And if the whole can not be conceived as growing, because already all that it can be, and yet each portion of it grows, we are confronted with a serious problem indeed. One solution immediately offers itself, which, while it would serve to account for our experiences

of incorrigible wrong-doing,* is hardly satisfactory to our moral or æsthetic sense, namely:—that retrogression in some exactly balances progression in others, so that the whole remains in stable equilibrium perpetually self-identical. But the thought of such a universe is a horrible purposeless swirl and monstrous unrest, sickening the soul with the very prospect of its own imperishable existence. And then to tell us, by way of consolation, as some would, that such is the universe, to be sure, but that an escape is provided for any soul out of this fiery "wheel of Nature" † upon definite conditions into what is to us now as yet non-being; and that though souls are thus constantly passing out,—becoming "extinct," indeed, so far as such poor living as this can be dignified by the name of life,—nevertheless the number that keep up the universal swirl of being, never suffers diminution on that account, because originally infinite; surely this were only to pile paradox on paradox, to answer a question by a harder question, to satisfy the spiritual cravings of man at the expense of accurate thinking.

Perhaps it would be better to recognize that thought can not deal with what has avowedly no limits. The zero and the infinite when they enter our premises vitiate our logic hopelessly, and no conclusion has cogency. Wherefore, if with human faculties even a picturesque solution of the mystery of existence

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**Cf.* Couds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shames; wandering stars, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. (St. Jude xii, 13.)

† St. Jas., iii, 6.

is to be legitimately obtained, one which will afford the mind a rational repose, it would be well not to render at the very start all thought impossible by the quite gratuitous assumption that we are dealing with a literary "infinite" and therefore "perfect" or "finished" universe.

Now, it would scarcely be fair to Whitman to impute to him such views. It suffices him to assert that the universe is as it should be, and is good; that it is adapted to the best advantages of us human souls and our less advanced fellows in animal, vegetable and crystal. The universe baffles our intellectual, moral, and æsthetic faculties of judgment. Therefore we say it is infinite, meaning that its limits are for us undiscoverable; that it is perfect, meaning that the intensity of its goodness and beauty are beyond our sense to endure. He has no cast-iron theory of the Cosmos. He regards even the seas and wind as "too big for formal handling" (Pr., p. 95), and therefore as improper subjects for the poet. The "common soil" itself (Pr., p. 100) escapes artistic grasp. All one can do in attempting a "pen and ink" sketch of it, is to enumerate various sensuous appeals it makes, several phases of its appearance. On this account the "demesne of poetry will always be not the exterior but the interior;" not the macrocosm but the microcosm." (Pr., p. 298.) He "leaves all free" (p. 190), and charges his disciples to do the same.

> I resist any thing better than my own diversity,
> Breathe the air, but leave plenty after me. (p. 42.)

So far as he can see, "Evolution" will explain every thing. He does not feel himself bound to

reckon over closely with what is beyond his sight, with possible "infinites" and "eternities" of an absolute sort. He enjoys Hegel's glorious philosophic tour-de-force, but he would be the last to pin his faith to Hegel. He insists on "leaving room ahead of himself" (Pr., p. 266), and of us, on what he calls "keeping vista." (p. 268.) Hegel after all is no more than an "indispensable" contributor to the "erudition of America's future," but hardly worth so much as the messages of the old "spiritual poets and poetry of other lands." (Pr., p. 177.) "Encompass worlds, but never try to encompass me" (p. 50), would be his defiant reply to urgent invitations of any officious spider of a Metaphysician to come into his gluey net of a parlor, besplangled though it were with the dews of the morning all asparkle in the sun.

But it will save space if I set forth dogmatically, at the risk of a little repetition, what seems to be the solution of the moral tangle in Whitman's poetry. Dogmatism is always a capital yoke-fellow to doubt; it is usually prudent to make up in positiveness for any lack of definite knowledge, as is the custom with not a few!

The word Evil is used by Whitman with five distinct meanings:

(1) Evil may mean the less good as compared to the good, the good as compared to better, the better as compared to best. In this sense "evil" is really "good;" different in degree only, not in kind.

(2) Evil may mean a supposed not-good; as such its existence is denied.

Omnes! Omnes! Let others ignore what they may,
I make the poem of evil also, I commemorate that part also,

I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation is—and I say *there is in fact no evil,*
(Or if there is, I say it is just as important to you, to the land or to me, as any thing else. (p. 22.)

In this passage we clearly see the first two meanings presented together.

(3) Evil may mean failure to develop according to the "inner light" (Pr., p. 465), the "spiritual divine faculty" (Pr., p. 284), "the inward Deity-planted law" (Pr., p. 465), because of an inadequate realization of one's destiny.

On this account, Whitman feels he has contributed a "new religion," and makes the start with the "divine pride" in one's self.

None has ever yet adored and worshiped half enough.
None has begun to think how divine he himself is and how certain the future. (p. 22.)

Here he strengthens the soul by a recognition of absolute law, to which there are no exceptions. He ridicules "miracles" in that sense. Privileges, too, he will have for none. (p. 48.) Therefore, there can be, of course, no substitutional atonements, no forgiveness. Remorseless law, expiation, and conversion in the strict sense of "turning about," and repentance in the sense of doing better, are with him the great pivotal words of ethics.*

A careful study of his conception of "sceptic" or "infidel" seems to give the word the sense of "a man who does not believe in man (*cf.*, p. 217), and consequently not in his own better self; a man who opposes the champion of liberty, political, social, per-

* These points will be substantiated by quotation later on in this paper.

sonal, who "supposes he triumphs" over principles and causes by crushing those who maintain and espouse them,* when in truth he is crushing himself in them. If a man can not love God unless he love man whom he hath seen, is it not equally true that unless a man believe in men, he never can believe in God? No man who believes in man is an infidel, however much he may think himself one. His emphatic denials are but perverse affirmations.

In such a wondrous world as this, goodness and faith in self can not seem strange:

> Now if a thousand perfect men were to appear, it would not amaze me. (p. 123.)
>
> The wonder is always and always, how there can be a mean man or an infidel. (p. 47.)

It is Whitman's special mission to "confound" wholly the "skeptic" "with the hush of his lips." (p. 50.) And surely no poet has held up to the man who has disbelieved in himself a more terrible "hand-mirror" than he. He shows the "infidel" (*i.e.*, the unbeliever in Whitman's religion) that he has become a slave—that his body publishes it abroad—and he cries out in a sympathetic despair for the man:

> Such a result so soon, and from such a beginning! (p. 213.)

(4) But evil may not mean failure to develop courageously from within, though such "evil" is the only evil there can be that is deplorable.

The true poet is "master of obedience." (p. 273, *cf.* Pr., p. 264.) The states must "obey little" and "resist much." (p. 15.) Men and women are to

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* *Cf.* "But for all this liberty, has not some out of place nor the infidel entered into full possession." (p. 287.)

"think lightly of the laws" as such. (p. 152.) Whitman goes so far as to "beat the gong of revolt." (p. 48.) His words are "reminders" of "life," "freedom," "extrication." (p. 48.) He is "really" "neither for nor against institutions" (p. 107), but he is for the soul. Now, if the soul did not refuse to be shaped from without, it could never develop from within. Rebellion against conventions, laws, decorums, any exterior efforts to reform or improve, must be. It is perfectly clear that if the "Holy Spirit" (interior Energy) is to work according to its own vital individual methods in the world of universal Law (of the "Father"), there needs to be in man "Satan," which is revolt not against the true "Father" from whom the "Holy Spirit" derives (who dictates to the individual his true development in perfect harmony with his world), but against a false "Law" of outside imposition; against also that very "Father" misconceived as external to the soul, for

> The soul has that measureless pride which revolts from every lesson but its own. (p. 291.)

The Savior the "mightier God" (p. 339), the "beautiful, gentle God" (p. 58), the "beautiful God the Christ" (p. 113), is he who manifested as sympathy and love, makes men aware of God the Holy Ghost,* and so may be said to "send" Him to them, who in his turn enlightening them "leads into all truth," so that "Satan" "falls from heaven," being no longer a god (*i. e.*, a good) to man, as man be-

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* Is the "Holy Ghost" or "Inner Light" to be considered synonymous with "Conscience?" (*Cf.* Pr., pp. 284, 465.)

comes "one with the Father" through the "mediation of the Son."

Such would seem to be the meaning of the "Square Deific" (p. 339), which for years refused to yield up its secret, because I was unable to see that with Whitman the "quaternary" that takes the place of the orthodox Christian Trinity represents in its manifoldness a process, not a being. The true God is not many, but One. When known as One Being, he is known as Self, and all differences and distinctions in the Deity necessarily efface themselves in rapturous ecstasy. If this doctrine, novel and strange, be a first installment of the new theology (Pr., p. 278), the more splendid theology (Pr., p. 286) which according to Whitman is fast coming, there are those who will feel somewhat alarmed. But, for their comfort, let me state that Whitman claims no infallible popes, councils, or churches for his dogma. He thinks the "New Theology" will not be "settled" quite "in a year nor even a century!" (Pr., p. 286.)

In the sense, then, of "Satan," evil is provisionally good. It is energy turned outward in self-defense, instead of being engaged at its normal work of building up the organism.*

(5) Evil may finally mean pain, defeat, age, death, the so-called ills which "flesh is heir to."

In this sense, Whitman denies that evil is to be deplored. Quotations might easily be multiplied indefinitely. "The soul forever and forever" (p. 21), and it would seem the soul is never more distinctly

* Compare with the "Chanting the Square Deific" the "Rounded Catalogue Divine Complete." (p. 419.)

self-conscious as master, than when it is confronted by a hostile environment. The whole of heroism and greatness is this attitude of defiance and denial. From the "Song of Joys," these lines are to the point:

O to struggle against great odds, to meet enemies undaunted!
To be entirely alone with them, *to find how much one can stand!*
To look strife, torture, prison, popular odium, face to face!
To mount the scaffold, to advance to the muzzles of guns with perfect nonchalance!
To be indeed a God! (p. 148.)

Defeat is as glorious as victory. The true guage of success is soul-growth.

"Battles are lost in the same spirit in which they are won." (p. 43.) All "overcome heroes" are to be cheered:

Did we think victory great?
So it is—but now it seems to me, when it can not be helped, that defeat is great,
And that death and dismay are great. (p. 288.)

Old age is met with the same spirit:

Sublime old age of manhood or womanhood,
Old age, calm, expanded, broad with the haughty breadth of the universe,
Old age, flowing free with the delicious nearby freedom of death.
—(p. 126.)

O the old manhood of me, my noblest joy of all!
My children and grandchildren, my white hair and beard,
My largeness, calmness, majesty out of the long stretch of my life. (p. 145.)

Women sit or move to and fro, some old, some young,
The young are beautiful—but the old are more beautiful than the young. (p. 217.)

No poet has sung old age more sublimely; his own in the gem entitled "Halcyon Days" (p. 388); old age and youth contrasted in "Youth, Day, Old Age and Night" (p. 180); the old man in st. 3. of "I sing the

body Electric." (p. 82.) "The ideal woman; practical, spiritual," in "As at thy portals also death" (p. 376); st. 11 of "Song of the Broad Axe" (p. 157); in the surpassingly beautiful st. 5 of "From Noon to Starry Night." (p. 355.) Death the "great sea" to which old age is the enlarging "estuary" "grandly spreading itself" is glorified. (p. 218.)

It may be that Walt Whitman has not treated this theme adequately. Certainly he has treated it as no one before him. There is nothing of Leopardi's courting of death because life is evil. It is just because life is good that he is led to believe "death"—the unknown life—still better. It is "just as lucky to die" as "to be born." (p. 34.) "What will be will be well, for what is is well." (p. 335.) Of death as immortality it is not yet time for us to treat.

If now pain, defeat, age, death, turn out to be no evils at all, what, then, is evil? Let us summarize the last few paragraphs:

Evil (1) = the less good:—essentially good; only relatively speaking not good.
(2) = the not good:—non-existent.
(3) = failure to develop from within:—the lack of good.
(4) = revolt against external laws:—a temporary good.
(5) = pain, defeat, old age, death:—opportunities for good, all good.

Of these, then, the only evil to be feared is the third, and that is the want of good, deficiency, failure to develop latent possibilities, sloth of soul; all which is not something self-existent, eternally opposed to good.

SALVATION AND THE SAVIOR.

The quality of Being in the object's self, according to its own central idea and purpose, and of growing therefrom and thereto—

not criticism by other standards and adjustments thereto—is the lesson of Nature. (Pr., p. 230.)

It is in this thought of evolution from within, of the vital guide at the heart, all else with reference to the individual thing tending to assist in its self-fulfillment, that Whitman finds his moral principle.

The whole theory of the universe is directed unerringly to one single individual—namely to You. (p. 273.)

All parts away for the progress of souls. (p. 127.)

Evil propels me and reform of evil propels me, I stand indifferent. (p. 46.)

I have no mockings or arguments, I witness and wait. (p. 32.)

The soul is . . . real,
No reasoning, no proof has established it,
Undeniable growth has established it. (p. 180.)

So far as we can see, growth is for growth's sake,—for growth is but "being"—nor can we push forward to a farther conception.

Have the past struggles succeeded? . . .
Now understand me well—it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary. —(p. 128.)

I said to my spirit: "When we become the enfolders of those orbs and the pleasure and knowledge of every thing in them, shall we be filled and satisfied then?"
And my spirit said: "No; we but level that lift, to pass and continue beyond." (p. 74.)

The law of promotion and transformation can not be eluded. —(p. 336.)

If you want a substantial conception rather than the formal one of "growth," he will suggest as synonym "eternal life." Does that need emotive qualification? If so, he can afford to give it the familiar name "happiness." (p. 78.) For to him, "the efflux of the soul is happiness." (p. 124.) The drift of

things is indefinable—"it is grand" and "it is happiness." (p. 171.) The "core of life" is "happiness." (p. 300.) Hence, a man needs to wait for no one and no thing to be complete. To be is to grow. To grow is eternal life. Eternal life is happiness.

> All triumphs and glories are complete in themselves, to lead onward. (p. 373.)

No stopping place is thought of—the end being beyond thought. Our last thought is *progress beyond thought.* From this we can readily make clear to ourselves why Walt Whitman is so strong in his rejection of asceticism. Every natural function is pure and good. There is no merit in mutilation. The body and its needs are to be reverenced:

> I believe in the flesh and the appetites. (p. 49.)

He is ambitious in his writings to

> permit to speak at every hazard
> Nature without check, with original energy. (p. 29.)

It is not too much life we have, but too little. Asceticism were the proper theory if any part of us could under any circumstances be overdeveloped. What seems overdevelopment of one, is really underdevelopment of some other, organ or function. What we need, then, is not repression, but right stimulation.

Not that Whitman utterly despises ascetic goodness.* It is good, no doubt, but simply not the best. It is, at all events, narrow, unbeautiful. It has its use as the method for exemplifying singly, certain particular perfections. But the object of nature is the man entire, characterized, like the poetry of the Bible, by "immense sensuousness immensely spiritual." (Pr.

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* Note his appreciation of Whittier. (Pr., pp. 181 and 481.)

p. 380.) In complete accord with Obermann, he thinks this result will be attained by remembering "that our best dependence is to be upon humanity itself, and its own inherent, normal, full-grown qualities, without any superstitious support whatever." (Pr., p. 214.)

How such a result is to be attained in particular cases, we are left to infer for ourselves. We have seen he recognizes a "universal will"—the destiny of any and every individual to be perfect. That "will" is, of course, "abysmic," and enters consciousness as the "conscience." The objects of conscience are seized upon with an enthusiasm which, fortified by a cosmic philosophy of indefinite development for the individual, is a Religion. But, so far as we can tell, Religion subserves a still higher end.

> Even in religious fervor there is a touch of animal heat. But moral conscientiousness, crystalline, without flaw, not Godlike only, entirely human, awes and enchants forever. Great is emotional love, even in the order of the rational universe. But, if we must make gradations, I am clear there is something greater. (Pr., p. 248.)

How this object is to be attained—that is, how this religious fervor is to be kindled, and to be in due time transmuted into "something greater"* is made fairly evident. Of course, you can not probe, preach, and persecute any more. If you did, you would only arouse "Satan" in a man.

> Underneath Christ the Divine I see,
> The dear love of man for his comrade. (p. 102.)

> Comerado I give you my hand,
> I give you my love more precious than money,
> I give myself before preaching or law,
> Will you give me yourself? Will you come travel with me?
> —(p. 129.)

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* Emerson's "Celestial Love?"

An invitation of this sort can be accepted by the proudest soul.

> Behold I do not give lectures or a little charity,
> When I give, I give myself. (p. 66.)

> Whoever walks a furlong without sympathy, walks to his own funeral drest in his shroud. (p. 76.)

And with Whitman this is not mere highsounding hyperbole. Lack of sympathy argues that you have fallen from a consciousness of that Self, which is also your neighbor's.

> I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person.
> My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.
> —(p. 60.)

If he finds you depressed he will infuse in you

> The joy of that vast elemental sympathy which only the human soul is capable of generating and emitting in steady and limitless floods. (p. 143.)

He knows his own incompleteness. It is relatively just as great as that of the lowest men.

> I feel I am of them—I belong to those convicts and prostitutes myself,
> And henceforth I will not deny them—for how can I deny myself? (p. 299.)

Does he meet them, his eye, his gesture, his mouth will reassure them:

> Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you.
> Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you, and the leaves to rustle for you, do my words refuse to glisten and rustle for you. (p. 299.)

Indeed he will keep his promise and break forth into his glorious hymn, "To You." (p. 186.)

> Your *true* soul and body appear before me. . . .
> None has understood you, but I understand *you*,

None has done justice to you, you have not done justice to yourself,
None but has found you imperfect, I only find no imperfection in *you*,
None but would subordinate you, I only am he who will never consent to subordinate you.
I only am he who places over you no master, owner, better, God, beyond what waits intrinsically in yourself. . . .
You have not known what you are, you have slumbered upon yourself all your life. . . .
The mockeries are not you.
Underneath them and within them I see *you* lurk, . . .
If these conceal you from others they do not conceal you from me. . . .
Whoever you are, claim your own at every hazard. (p. 186–187.)

This is the "new religion," the "greater religion," which yet is not *new*. Behind our most modern philosophy and art is "the same old heart and brain;" the "insight and inspiration of the same old humanity." The "physiognomy" alone can change, thinks Whitman. (*Cf.* Pr., p. 335.)

However, it is frankly as "Poet" that he sees the "Saviour." In literature is to be the soul of democracy. It is to be a general consciousness. (*Cf.* Pr., p. 247.) "The Song of the Answerer," "By Blue Ontario's Shore," and "Democratic Vistas" have this thought for burden; and Whitman would contend that after all this notion is confirmed by the history of the greatest teacher of antiquity and the nature of his influence to-day. In the simple home it is Jesus the Poet, the maker of certain beautiful parables, who influences for good. It is his life, itself the poem of poems, which, apart from all theories about his person and his work, touches the souls of men, and infilters itself into their lives. Of course by "literature" we know

just what Whitman means. For him the poet is a "free channel of himself," (Pr., p. 268), giving "things without increase or diminution." "He takes his data from science. (*Cf.* Pr., p. 269.) His manner is characterized by an "absence of tricks." (Pr., p. 272.) His subject is "not nature, but man." (Pr., p. 298.) He has the "rapt vision" to which the "seen becomes the prophecy of the unseen" (Pr., p. 299); he is the complete lover of the universe," "leaving room ahead of himself" (Pr., p. 266), and he treats even the universal from no fictitious point of view, but from that which he actually occupies. (Pr., p. 229.) He himself illustrates his doctrine for he is

> The glory and extract thus far of things and of the human race. (p. 137.)

"Leaves of Grass" also, since "personal force is behind every thing" (p. 435), presents us a "Person;" (p. 438) and so, for the true "Answerer" "the Maker of poems," who "settles justice, reality, immortality" (p. 137), he "gives us himself" after all (p. 66), having, as he admits, unconsciously taken upon himself to be *an* Answerer.

IMMORTALITY.

Let us now turn our attention to the doctrine of immortality as it was conceived by Walt Whitman. In this region especially are his theological exotics exuberant. His doctrine of the divine Self has a latent strain of oriental mysticism. In his dealing, however, with life, death, and immortality—the progress of that divine Self beyond these known conditions—he orientalizes, if possible, yet more decidedly. And as he laid great stress on "what" a man or a nation "thinks

of death" because in his opinion the "idea of immortality, above all other ideas," is to "give crowning religious stamp to democracy in the new world" (Pr., p. 281), it is incumbent upon every sympathetic student to ascertain just what Whitman himself thought likely to be the form of the doctrine suited to modern times. Here, too, I conceive, it is not my duty to criticise but to present. Strictures are always an inviting field for the flying of rhetorical kites. All you can learn from them, though, is how the wind of prejudice is blowing for him who holds the strings. I venture to think a painstaking mosaic of Whitman's chief utterances will serve the reader better than some gratuitous observations of the present writer on the damnable wickedness of heresy! Let it be clearly understood, however, that there is nothing willful and capricious in Whitman's adoption of views on these subjects unusual to us of the West. Indeed, his doctrines,* though often undoubtedly coincident with oriental theories are developed for very different reasons. They originate with him in his passion for an ideal democracy, an ultimate divine City of Friends, where there will be no occasion for the preference of one to another, because all are positively equal.

Much as Whitman believes in "love" he never could adopt it as a provisional solution of the problem of divine justice. He never cared to believe that "stars differ from one another in glory." (1 Cor.

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* See footnote of this essay at the end of Section 8 (p. 314) for corroborative evidence on Whitman's independent development of those ideas concerning which the suspicion of direct derivation from oriental theosophies is most plausible.

xv, 41.) Such a doctrine seemed to him a projection of arbitrary social distinction into the sphere of eternity. He could not believe in a cosmic partiality. All must have had the same beginning. All must end in the same perfection. The different degrees of natural endowment can not of course be chance; if they can not be ascribed to divine caprice, after the Calvinistic fashion, there is only room left for the thought that the physical and spiritual capital with which we start here is what we have earned according to universal law in an eternal pre-existence. The differences to us, which make the doctrine of "equality" incredible, and that of "fraternity" therefore difficult of reduction to practice, are only a matter of relative speed. God fixes the beginning and the end—nay, is the beginning and the end. He gives us indefinite time, and leaves us free to choose our route. We can travel in a straight line, or in vast spirals, or in fantastic loops and labyrinthine tangles. But the end, "the seed perfection," was within the "first huge nothing" (p. 71), and is to the open spiritual eye so distinctly visible as to make even now the democratic faith a beautiful certainty.

The thought of the family in which each rejoices that he is really surpassed by some brother or sister; the delight of self-subordination to those we love; the keen selfless enjoyment, in sympathy, of the greatness that is greater than any we shall ever attain; the delicious attribution of our greatness to those less great, not as ours, but as a revelation of His who is their Father and ours; a communion of reciprocal aspiration and inspiration up a vast stairway of grades of being, one current of holy Love,

and beatific selflessness running up and down the chain of joined hands: (God Himself the unity of this eternal diversity—the white light in which the several rays are absorbed, lost to vision, though still continuous distinct elements of its manifold whole): such symbol ideas of the life beyond were apparently incompatible with a thorough belief in democracy, according to Whitman. It was not for their strangeness' sake that he suggests a Swedenborgian spiritual body, a Hindu metempsychosis, and hints a resolution of all inequality in a "One formed out of all," (p. 21) making the "vast similitude" the night creates to the eye (*cf.* p. 207) or sleep to the mind, significant of the "Truth:"

The antipodes, and every one between this and them in the dark,
I swear they are averaged now—one is no better than the other,
The night and sleep have *likened them and restored them.*
I swear they are beautiful,
Every one that sleeps is beautiful, every thing in the dim light is
beautiful,
The wildest and bloodiest is over, and all is peace.
Peace is always beautiful,
The myth of heaven indicates peace and Night. (pp. 330–1.)

Not, thus, as hitherto customary among us, the day, that distinguishes, but the night that charitably and, one might say, unmorally covers all disparities, and fuses in one tranquil mystery all that is, serves Whitman as symbol of his ultimate Ideal. (*Cf.* Pr., pp. 101, 119, 126; L. of G. 344, 369.)

There never could have been in Whitman any love of exotics as such.

Have you not imported this or the spirit of it in some ship? (p. 271)

is one of his searching questions to the would-be poet of America. For the poet must be original; singers and

rhymers as he calls them, amused with "a prettiness," are not under obligation to create. (*Cf.* p. 272.) But in the poet's work every thing must be native; and the more one ponders over the doctrines of apparently oriental origin, the more one is convinced they are with Whitman developed from within. Transcendental sentiments consistent with a "divine democracy" took speculative formal elements from such eastern doctrines as were suited for wholesome and complete assimilation by them; and with Whitman these sentiments were never allowed to forget their immediate origin:—an unreasoned faith in the unqualified equality and fraternity of man.*

See ever so far, there is limitless space outside of that,
Count ever so much, there is limitless time around that. (p. 73.)

Now when the soul is at its highest vital pitch it declares confidently:

I know I have the best of time and space, and was never measured, and never will be measured. (p. 73.)

I know I am deathless,
I know this orbit of mine can not be swept by a carpenter's compass,

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* Democracy is to Whitman so wonderful, because it is, as he conceives it, the method of Nature. (Pr., pp. 68–69.) It individualizes and universalizes. (Pr., p. 220.) The individualization is the source itself of sympathy, as a clear self-knowledge implies a knowledge of others. Sympathy universalizes. This sympathy or love he terms adhesiveness. (Pr., foot-note, p. 247.) Poetry is to be the Soul of democracy (Pr., p. 247), in that it is to individualize men, bring them to self-knowledge. It is to be the vehicle of religion. (Pr., pp. 222, 279.) For an understanding of his views on the essence of democracy perhaps the shortest helpful essay is his "Carlyle from an American point of view." (Pr., pp. 170–178.) The three prefaces and "Democratic Vistas" should be read if possible.

I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue cut with a burnt stick at night,

. . . .

I laugh at what you call dissolution,
And I know the *amplitude of time.* (p. 45.)

He is not of those who assert that it makes no difference whether or not there be any outlook beyond the laying down of the body:—

Is to-day nothing? is the beginningless past nothing?
If the future is nothing they are just as surely nothing. (p. 333.)

The future is no more uncertain than the present. (p. 151.)

Do you suspect death? If I were to suspect death I should die now,
Do you think I could walk pleasantly and well suited toward annihilation? (p. 337.)

But the fact is he does "walk pleasantly and well suited;" and though he can not cogently reason out to a satisfactory conclusion, he sees in the facts an immanent assurance:

I do not doubt that whatever can possibly happen is provided for in the inherences of things. (p. 342.)

Did you think Life was so well provided for, and Death, the purport of all Life, is not well provided for? (p. 342.)

For, apparently, life is for death:

What invigorates life invigorates death; (p. 151.)

so much so that

Life, life is the tillage, and Death is the harvest according.
—(p. 346.)

A thing is never understood but in relation to its origin and end. The mystery of life is not without reason:

O! I see now that life can not exhibit all to me, as the day can not,
I see that I am to wait for what will be explained by death.
—(p. 345.)

The question "what is life?" involves the question

"what is death?" The thought that they are one, while it gives us no clearer understanding of life, leaves the soul at all events satisfied. We have seen about us the wonderful play of life. Every spring from "dead clods and chills as from low burial graves," a "thousand forms" rise. "Bloom and growth" imply materials. (p. 399.) In decay Whitman smells "the white roses sweet and scented" and reaches to "leafy lips" and "to the polished breasts of melons." (p. 77.) "What chemistry!" he cries, considering "that all is clean forever and forever," and an ecstasy fills him when he realizes that the earth which

> Gives such divine materials to men, and accepts such leavings at last,
> Grows such sweet things out of such corruptions,

and in spite of all attempts to pollute, "turns harmless and stainless on its axis." (pp. 286–7.)

Now, a consideration of the destiny of man in the "light of the processes wherein" life "seems" the leaving of many deaths "would lead us up to a doctrine like that of George Eliot's 'Choir Invisible.'" But although (with Whitman), we may believe this to be a doctrine of immortality entirely true so far as it goes, nothing prevents us (with Whitman also) going beyond it to further assertions of the perpetuation of spiritual being, if we are not yet reconciled to death, when told that life is a continual dying. We may admit that the earth is falling to the sun every moment while aware that she is not arriving at her destination very fast. Similarly the bird is sinking earthward, but the libration of his wings is at the same time lifting him heavenward, and so he soars on quietly in the blue serene.

O living always, always dying!
O the burials of me past and present,
O me while I stride ahead, material, visible as ever.
—(p. 344.)

That is just it. Our life is a delicate balance in favor of the organism between constructive energies and destructive forces. Face to face with death, indeed, the horrible doubt comes:

Matter is conqueror—matter triumphant, continues forever.
—(p. 341.)

Are souls drowned and destroyed so?
Is only matter triumphant? (p. 345.)

But as a loyal Positivist you cry "No!" Soul triumphs as fully as matter. No form of matter abides. No form of soul does either. A spiritual chemistry analogous to that of the physical world actually perpetuates all that is precious,

And nothing endures but personal qualities. (p. 152.)

If all come to ashes of dung,
If maggots and rats ended us, then Alarum! for we are betrayed.
—(p. 337.)

You may say that the martyrs live.

They live in other young men, O Kings,
They live in brothers again to defy you,
They were purified by death, they were taught and exalted.
—(p. 212.)

Doubtless this is perfectly reasonable. It is a matter besides not of speculation but of experience, and, as shown by the quotations, Whitman heartily agrees with all this. Not by the elimination of the spiritually weak (as unfit to survive), but rather by the elimination of the spiritually strong (as needing no longer to survive), is virtue in this world increased. For every one true man slain two arise in his place.

Propagation of spiritual qualities is not by physical inheritance, but by moral inoculation. So is

> The loftiest of life upheld by death. (p. 366.)

It is a noble thing to sing the song of the old California trees:

> Nor yield we mournfully, majestic brothers,
> We who have grandly filled our time;
> With Nature's calm content, with tacit huge delight,
> We welcome what we wrought for through the past,
> And leave the field for them.
> For them predicted long,
> For a superber race, they too to fill their time,
> For them we abdicate, *in them ourselves* ye forest kings!
> —(p. 166–7.)

PERSONAL IDENTITY.

But true as all this doubtless is, it is hard to believe that "personal qualities" can only be transferred as flame from torch to torch.

"I swear nothing is good to me that ignores individuals." (p. 341.) And this sort of "qualitative immortality" does absolutely ignore the individual.

"Only what satisfies souls is true." (p. 201.) This Comtist doctrine in and of itself can not satisfy the soul. We do not believe we are "qualities" merely. We know we are substance; whatever that may be, it is what we are. If we were conscious of ourselves as "mere qualities" undoubtedly the propagation of them would be the continuance of our conscious life. Whitman, thinking of the past history of the race, asks significantly:

> Are those billions of men really gone?
> Are those women of the old experience of the earth gone?
> *Do their lives*, cities, arts, *rest only with us?*
> *Did they achieve nothing* for good *for themselves?*

I believe all those men and women . . . every one exists, etc.
—(p. 289.)

What do you think has become of the young and old men?
And what do you think has become of the women and children?
They are alive and well somewhere,
The smallest sprout shows *there is really no death*,
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,
And ceased the moment life appeared.
All goes onward and onward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed and luckier.
—(p. 34.)

"In fact I know I am deathless" (p. 44) in an individual way.

There is that in me—I do not know what it is—but I know it is in me. . . .
I do not know it—it is without name. . . .
It is not chaos or death—it is form, union, plan—
It is eternal life—it is Happiness. (pp. 77–78.)

Then, too, when "I plead" in my heart with the universe "for my brothers and sisters" (p. 78) I can not but remember "the young man" and "the young woman put by his side"—their lives only a beautiful morning; "the little child that peeped in at the door, and then drew back and was never seen again"—a mere false start; "the old man who has lived without purpose," and now that it is too late, has become aware of it, "and feels it with bitterness worse than gall;" there are the diseased, the degraded, those still half-brutish, those that are "sacs merely floating with open mouths for food to slip in." (p. 70.) For these he perceives that life as we know it does not provide; they can not be overlooked in the universal providence; that something which provides for them is again Life. Only Life can

complete life. Of this Life, "this heavenly mansion," death is "the opener and usher" (p. 213), to it death is "the exquisite transition." (p. 373.) Love teaches this lesson:

> Death, death, death, death, death! (p. 201.)

and the "vast heart, like a planet's chained and chaffing" of the moonlit sea—telling its "tale of cosmic elemental passion" (p. 392) utters also:

> The word of the sweetest song and all songs,
> That strong and delicious word. . . . (p. 201.)

But not in grief only is this felt to be love's natural lesson:

> For how calm, how solemn it grows to ascend to the atmosphere of lovers.
> Death or life—I am then indifferent, my soul declines to prefer.
> (I am not sure but the high soul of lovers welcomes death most.)
> —(p. 96.)

> . . . You are folded inseparably, you, love and death are.
> Nor will I allow you to balk me any more with what I was calling life,
> For now it is conveyed to me that you are the purports essential,
> That you abide in those shifting forms of life, for reasons, and that they are mainly for you,
> That you beyond them come forth to remain the real reality.
> —(p. 97.)

The great intellectual insights into life, as loudly and clearly as love does, speak of death.

> I foresee too much, it means more than I thought,
> It appears to me I am dying. (p. 381.)

Indeed, "Fancy," to which at death the poet says farewell, may be but another name for it.

> May be it is yourself now really ushering me to the true songs.
> —(p. 422.)

therefore, "retaining" his "heart's and soul's un-

mitigated faith" up "to the last" (Pr., p. 520) the dying poet cries:

Good-bye—and *hail!* my Fancy! (p. 422.)

It is not mere despair of this life; it is life at its height that promises continuance and completion. It is sympathy, love, it is transcendent moments of vital vision, it is flashes of spiritual illumination, it is this all which urges the soul to say deliberately aloud:

I do not think life provides for all, and for time and space, but I believe Heavenly Death provides for all. (p. 342.)

Death of earth is birth of heaven. How does the soul know this? How can you be sure you should call it "heavenly?" May it not indeed be "hellish?" If justice is not fully shown us here and now, may not a monster Injustice, naked, bloodsmeared, eyes lurid in the dark—savage tooth and claw eager to rend us—hold despotic sway in those realms unknown? To this Whitman can only answer that he has not found a lack of justice here. "What is" is well with reference to what was. "What will be will be well" therefore with reference to "what is." (p. 335.) "The law of promotion and transformation can not be eluded." (p. 336.) There is no evil at all in this our experience of life but what amounts to a "lagging in the race," and that will be set right by indefinite time.

I do not know what is untried and afterward,
But I know it will in its turn prove sufficient and can not fail.
—(p. 70.)

Whither I walk I can not define, but I know it is good,
The whole universe indicates that it is good,
The past and the present indicate that it is good. (p. 337.)

Therefore, he can invoke death with a gentle song (p. 346) as though singing his own painless birth, or soothing his past to sleep awhile in the gentle cradle of the grave.

But once grant this indestructible identity throughout change to man, why should it be denied to animals and trees? Why, the very thought of fixed species is odious.* Nothing ought to be arbitrarily fixed forever. "Every thing" for Whitman "has an eternal soul."

> The trees have rooted in the ground! the weeds of the sea have! the animals! (p. 337.)

The soul "receives identity through materials." (p. 146.) It built up out of these a body, and so the soul "received identity by its body."

> That I was I knew was of my body, and what I should be I knew I should be of my body. (p. 131.)

This body was "born" of its "mother" to "identify" the soul. (p. 335.)

> The known life, the transient,
> Is to form and decide identity for the unknown life, the permanent. —(p. 337.)

The world about it "leads" the soul to "identity" and "body" (p. 349) and offers it further:

> The temporary use of materials for *identity's* sake; (p. 374.)

and finally, "there is nothing but immortality." (p. 337.)

> All is preparation for it—and identity is for it. (Id.)

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* "On the Origin of Species, etc.," 1859, "The Descent of Man, etc.," 1871, Whitman, as Goethe (Wordsworth on one occasion) and Browning must be credited with a thorough grasp of the idea of universal evolution before the epoch making books of Darwin were composed.

But if "identity" always implies "body" and the "corpse" we will leave will be but "excrementitions," (p. 344)—indeed, "for reasons" it is "myself" who "discharge my excrementitious body" (p. 147)—there must be a "real body doubtless left to me for other spheres." The "voided body" returns to "further offices," to "the eternal uses of the earth." (Id.) If even now "it is not my material eyes which finally see, nor my material body which finally loves, walks, laughs, shouts, embraces, procreates" (p. 146), then even now there must be a real body that does these things.

> The living look upon the corpse with their eyesight
> But without eyesight lingers a different living and looks curiously on the corpse. (p. 333.)
>
> O to disengage myself from those corpses of me, which I turn and look at where I cast them. (p. 344.)

Such lines then as these are not to be taken as fanciful altogether. Whitman does not doubt that "interiors have their interiors, and that exteriors have their exteriors;" "that the eyesight has another eyesight, and the hearing another hearing, and the voice another voice." (p. 342.) Even now to the seer "your true soul and *body* appear." (p. 186.) Just as surely as

> I see one building, the house that serves him for a few years, or seventy or eighty years at most,

if my spiritual eyes were open could

> I see one building, the house that serves him longer than that.
> —(p. 334.)

Indeed, Whitman can see his fellow-man constructing, though unconsciously, "the house of himself or herself" that will "serve for all time." (p. 304.)

Nor does this "real body" pass out empty, as it "passes to fitting spheres," for it "carries what has accrued to it from the moment of birth to the moment of death." (p. 25.) It has been thus fashioned, invisibly, by the hands of life to serve as organ to your veritable Self. No bullet can really "kill what you really are." (p. 251.)

> What you are picks its way. (p. 188.)

Nay, already while leading this life of fleshly vicissitude "Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am. . . . I witness and wait." (p. 32.) What is more, this "Me myself" (p. 32) is not the soul, if Whitman be relied upon to use his terms with any accuracy, for elsewhere we read:

> I too, *with* my soul and body,
> We, a curious trio, picking, wandering on our way. (p. 185.)

We should have then, according to our review so far of Whitman's doctrine, at least four distinct elements in man:—

(1) the excrementitious body.
(2) the real body.
(3) the soul.
(4) Me myself.

PERPETUITY OF CHARACTER.

But all this would seem unnecessary speculation if for the soul beyond these spheres there were nothing more to provide for than identity. "What has accrued to the soul" on earth, of which the real body is vehicle, must be in itself a secure possession. Now on no subject is Whitman more emphatic than on the

universality of Law. "The whole Universe is absolute Law." (Pr., p. 336.) Miracles in the sense of wonders all things whatsoever most assuredly are:—

> Why, who makes much of a miracle?
> As to me I know of nothing but miracles (p. 301);

in the sense of exceptions, however, there can be none without immediately reducing cosmos to chaos. "The great master has nothing to do with miracles." (Pr., p. 270.) The true modern Poet denies all exceptions. "Law is the unshakable order of the universe forever; and the law over all, and law of laws, is the law of successions; that of the superior law, in time, gradually supplanting and overwhelming the inferior one." (Pr., p. 219.) This passage has immediate reference, to be sure, to "physical force being superseded by that of the spirit," but its language implies that it is of general validity. Thus we have evolution as the "law of laws."

With the irrefragableness of law* and with the doctrine besides that "only the soul is of itself—all else has reference to what ensues" so that in it is the real judge of conduct,† it is clear there can be "no possible forgiveness or deputed atonement." (p. 291; Pr., p. 273.) "Each man to himself, and each woman to herself, is the word of the past and the present, and the true word of immortality." ‡ (p. 178.) Jehovah,

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* *Cf.* Miracles, p. 301.

† Compare "There is no one or any particle but has reference to the soul" (p. 25) with "It is not consistent with the reality of the soul to admit that there is any thing in the known universe more divine than men and women." (Pr., p. 270.)

‡ See in Appendix a note on Lord Byron as a "Chanter of Personality" in the sense of a moral responsibility that can not be shifted on another.

Brahm, or Saturnius, Universal Law in Time, "is relentless" and "forgives no man"—"dispenses . . . judgments inexorable without the least remorse." (p. 339.) Expiation alone blots out:

Miserable! yet for thy errors, vanities, sins, I will not now rebuke
thee,
Thy unexampled woes and pangs have quelled them all,
And left thee sacred. (p. 306.)

It is, however, not suffering as such that helps. It is suffering, of the kind that *quells* the *sins* by stimulating growth, which of itself alone amounts to a "forgiveness."

In the higher structure of a human self, or of community, the Moral, the Religious, the Spiritual, is strictly analogous to the subtle vitalization and antiseptic play called Health in the physiological structure. (Pr., p. 471.)

Reformation comes from within. Evil being underdevelopment, all that is needed is *development*. There is, when the ways are amended, no sin left to forgive.

Of all "leadings," "none lead to greater things" than occupations "lead to." (p. 175.) Columbus gave God a "long and crowded life of active work, not adoration merely." (p. 323.)

Ah! little recks the laborer,
How near his work is holding him to God,
The loving Laborer through space and time. (p. 157.)

For the law of action and reaction being equal and contrary extends into the spiritual world, and is its chief law: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Gal. vi, 7.)

All that a person does, says, thinks, is of consequence,
Not a move can a man or woman make that affects him or her in

a day, month, any part of the direct lifetime, or the hour of death,
But the same affects him or her onward afterward through the indirect lifetime. (p. 290.)
All that is to be henceforth thought or done by you, whoever you are, or by any one,
These inure, have inured, shall inure, to the identities from which they sprang, or shall spring. (p. 291.)

Therefore, there is a "prudence that suits immortality." (p. 289.)* True, "caution" has reference to the eternal, preferring it to the temporal. (*Cf.* Pr., p. 272.) It "knows that only that person has really learned" the lesson of life well, who has "learned to prefer results" (p. 291),† "immense spiritual results" (p. 374); and aware that every act "has results beyond death as really as before death" (p. 290), the truly prudent man, whose caution goes far enough (Pr., p. 272), realizes to the full that

Charity and personal force are the only investments worth any thing for after all. (p. 290.)

"Itself only finally satisfies the soul" (p. 291), and not any thing exterior and adventitious contributing to its real secret felicity, which as seen before is always an "Efflux of the Soul."

We shall have to add then to our analysis of the constitution of man, according to Whitman, a further element inhering in the real body and the soul, the perpetuity of which is strongly affirmed—the Character.

We have thus five distinct elements:

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* *Cf.* Emerson's Essays on Prudence, Self-Reliance, and Compensation.

† Not utilitarian doctrine, *e. g.*, his idea of the greatness of defeat, etc., pp. 43, 45, 288, etc.

Body { (1) excrementitious Body,
(2) the real Body,

Soul { (3) the Character,
(4) the Soul,

Spirit — (5) Me myself,

which, if we have bracketed the first two couples, are very readily reducible to the Pauline trichotomy.*

"TRAVELING SOULS" AND THEIR END.

In the matter of Whitman's theology there now remains only to adduce evidence as to what his conception of immortal life really is. "Something there is more immortal than the stars." (p. 206.) He believes in nothing short of perfection for each and all. It is part of Whitman's very manliness that he does not want privileged classes, saints or heroes. He wants equal opportunities. He does not himself get

* Particular evidence of the view taken in this paper (that Whitman's oriental doctrines were not merely borrowed or adopted) may be found in the fact that his analysis of man gives us five elements only instead of the Hindu Seven. To make them seven, the "Me Myself" would have to be declared a Trinity. If it be contended that he does recognize Father, Son and Holy Ghost, it must be remembered that where he does so, he gives similar recognition to Satan. In case then you take the "Square Deific" literally as analyzing the "Divine Me Myself," you would have eight and not seven elements. But, as indicated already, I do not understand the "Square Deific" as a study of "God," but of our "Idea of God," quite another thing. Whitman does not presume to give us a bit of Divine Psychology. Of the inner life of Diety, he does not pretend to know more than any other sane and enlightened mortal. And, for one, "with the Mystery of God *he* dares not dally."

any mean comfort from being above others. He is thoroughly consistent, as most revolutionaries and vindicators of the people's rights, alas, are not:—

> By God! I will accept nothing which all can not have their counterpart of on the same terms. (p. 48.)

He sings exultantly:—

> Of the progress of the souls of men and women along the grand roads of the universe, all other progress is the needed emblem and sustenance.
>
> Forever alive, forever forward . . .
> They go! they go! I know that they go, but I know not where they go,
> But I know that they go toward the best. (p. 127.)

Feeling that he has not really finished the work he might have done, not learned the lesson out, not tasted all the legitimate delights here, he believes that he will "come again upon the earth after five thousand years." (p. 69.) When he meets a man full of his achievements he pointedly reminds him of a certain possibility likely to calm him:

> Have you outstript the rest? are you the president?
> It is a trifle, they will more than arrive there, every one and still pass on. (p. 45.)

Clearly it will not be in this particular earth life. To members of low and unfortunate races he addresses words of comfort and encouragement:—

> I do not say one word against you way back there where you stand,
> You will come forward in due time to my side. (p. 120.)

He is not anxious about the ill-born and ill-bred:—

> The twisted skull waits, the watery or rotten blood waits,
> The child of the glutton waits long, and the child of the drunkard waits long, and the drunkard himself waits long,

The sleepers that lived and died wait, the far advanced are to go on in their turns, and the far behind are to come on in their turns. (p. 331.)

I saw the face of the most smeared and slobbering idiot they had at the asylum,
And I knew for my consolation what they knew not,
I knew of the agents that emptied and broke my brother,
The same wait to clear the rubbish from the fallen tenement,
And I shall look again in a score or two of ages,
And I shall meet the real landlord perfect and unharmed, every inch as good as myself. (p. 354.)

His attitude to the animals is of course exactly the same; and why not? Does he not feel between them and himself a very decided kinship?

They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their possession,
I wonder where they got those tokens,
Did I pass that way huge times ago and negligently drop them?
—(p. 54.)

Nor will he confine his doctrine of progress from form to form by any means to animals:—

The vegetables and the minerals are all perfect, and the imponderable fluids perfect;
Slowly and surely they have passed on to this, and slowly and surely they yet pass on. (p. 337.)

How significant, after perusing those extracts together, sound not now the words quoted before in a feebler sense:—

As to you Life, I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths,
(No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before!) (p. 77.)

He is not one whit tired in spirit:

All below duly traveled, and still I mount and mount.* (p. 71.)

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* That Whitman ever went further, and found it necessary to adopt a theory of cycles or "cosmic incarnations," so to say, is very doubtful. The word "cycle" appears three times in L. of G., pp. 27, 72, 85. With his anthropocentric view, the cosmos

We have seen that he has fully kept his word, having sung the "Songs of birth and shown that there are many births." (p. 380.)

If any one should protest, but "I do not care to be perfect at such a cost; I don't want you to be urging me this way. I am tired. Sing me a pleasant lullaby instead, about how every thing is going to be *done for me!*" I fancy sturdy old Walt would answer: "Go lull yourself with what you can understand, and with pianoforte tunes, for I lull nobody, and you will never understand me." (p. 252.) Yet there *is* a peace ahead. That fifth element in man, the Me myself, is one in all. To live in it is to be finally at rest. This it was the very object of Whitman to glorify, yet with beautiful candor he confesses inability to approach it for us.

The diverse shall be no less diverse, but they shall flow and unite—they unite now. (p. 331.)

There is to be yet a "salvation universal," an indescribable attainment:

When I undertake to tell the best, I find I can not. . . .
I become a dumb man. (p. 179.)

Aware that . . . before all my arrogant poems the real Me stands, yet untouched, untold, altogether unreached,
Withdrawn far, mocking me with mock congratulatory signs and bows,
With peals of distant ironical laughter at every word I have written,

---

did not interest him *per se*. To account for it was not his object. Indeed he tells us (*cf.* Pr., p. 298) "the rule and demesne of poetry will always be not the exterior but the interior, not the macrocosm but microcosm, not Nature but Man. Of the doctrine of metempsychosis a good illustration is given in the closing eight lines of "The Sleepers." (p. 332.) (*Cf.* p. 282 of this essay.)

Pointing in silence to these songs and then to the sand beneath,
I perceive I have not really understood any thing, not a single object, and that no man ever can,
Nature here in sight of the sea, taking advantage of me to dart upon me and sting me,
Because I have dared to open my mouth and sing at all.
—(pp. 202–3.)

In the poem, "A Riddle Song," he shows why this is so. That which eludes him is that which makes all intelligible, and which itself can only be known face to face.

Haply God's riddle it, so vague and yet so certain,
The soul for it, and all the visible universe for it,
And heaven at last for it. (p. 363.)

It is the terrible "One Self" *—

The fanged and glittering One whose head is over all, (p. 21.)

and of whom to speak as one's self is absurd, and yet as "other than one's Self" absurder still.

Hymns to the universal God from the universal Man are the last fact we discern with mortal eye, illumined though it be:

The ocean filled with joy—the atmosphere all joy!
Joy! Joy! in freedom, worship, love! joy in the ecstasy of life!
Enough to merely *be!* enough to breathe!
Joy! Joy! all over joy! (p. 358.)†

WHITMAN'S METHODS AND STYLE.

To compose according to a theory that greatly varies from what may be said to have at least been immanent in literature before, is a perilous venture.

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* For clearness' sake I have taken some liberties with the word "oneself," spelling it differently according to the different meanings.

† See pp. 255–259 for an exposition of the doctrine of the One.

Men of great initiative genius and courage will, to be sure, always stake life and fame upon a consistent protest against tyrannous tradition. But more often than not a man's theory of composition is one thing, and his practice another.

Now, Whitman undoubtedly repels many a reader by his oracular manner. He is fully aware of this.

These leaves and me you will not understand,
They will elude you at first and still more afterward. I will certainly elude you.
Even while you should think you had unquestionably caught me, behold!
Already you see I have escaped from you. (p. 98.)

Nor is it any thing we can really bring against him. He writes to "tease us out of" our usual petty "thought."* He delights in paradox. He does not try to astonish. The man is free from any conscious tricks. The fact is, however, that the whole object of Whitman at all times is not to do something for his reader, but to make his reader do something for himself.

You are asking me questions and I hear you,
I answer that I can not answer, you must find out for yourself.
—(p. 74.)

If poetry be "criticism of life" or not, is best settled by the fact perhaps that the only true criticism of great poetry is life. Such Walt Whitman's surely is if we should accept this test—that the great poetry keeps pace with our advance, always a step or two ahead—while poetry that is not great we soon leave behind:

* Keat's "Ode to a Grecian Urn;" the office of all true art.

For it is not for what I have put into it that I have written this book,
Nor is it by reading it you will acquire it. (p. 98.)

Undoubtedly however there are other tests of poetry which seem more important to the majority of critics. That he should have to "wait to be understood by the growth of the taste of" himself (p. 273) would be nothing peculiar to him;—Wordsworth, Shelley, Browning, are well known modern instances of an author's having, as it were, to beget a new generation of readers.

But though Whitman's "words" do undoubtedly "itch at" one's "ears," till they are understood (p. 75), it would be insincere in the most enthusiastic disciple not to admit the many difficulties of approach to his master which seem at first sight gratuitous tests of patience, fortitude, self-control, and one might almost add foolhardihood. A man who boldly declares that "serving art in its highest" is "only the other name for serving God, and serving humanity" (Pr., p. 242), would, it might be supposed, spare no pains to make what he attempts to create as nearly perfect as possible. But it is not so much that Whitman considers the "love of the best" a "friend" that only "harries" man;* it is that with him the poem is not on paper, or in the ear of the reader, but in his mind. Perfect "literary form" to Whitman is whatever most directly arouses in the reader's mind what is in the poet's own. He goes even further than this. A moral purpose is always latent. "Not the book needs so much to be the complete thing, but the reader of the book does." (Pr., p. 257.) The reader "must himself construct . . .

* *Cf.* "Sphinx" of R. W. Emerson.

the poem." The poet's language, if "fanned by the breath of nature," "seldomer tells a thing than suggests or necessitates it." (Id.) The poet, because he is a poet, wants to make a poet of you. He is—"hungry for equals day and night." (Pr., p. 269.) Like Moses he cries "would God that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them."* He will have you not only become quite independent of him furnishing your own home-made chants, but he will have you illustrate them in what you are. "All must give place to men and women." (p. 175.) "How dare you place any thing before a man?" (p. 272.) "The psalm" does not sing itself, therefore he prefers "the singer," and, quite consistently, the reader is more precious to him than the poems he shall peruse. (p. 175.) These are, therefore, "not the finish," but rather "the outset." "To none will they bring to be content and full." (p. 138.) They will be "good health to you." (p. 79.) They are "chants . . . to vivify all" (p. 20) by inspiring the faith which in turn arouses dormant powers.

Now it is a fact that Whitman's poems possess, to a very eminent degree, this vital suggestiveness.† Nor is there any respectable critic who will quarrel with their originality of form as such. He does not consider our prejudices when he writes.‡ "People resent any thing new as a personal insult" (Pr., p. 482), and in support of this he quotes Bacon as saying that "the first sight of any work really new and first rate

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* Numb. xi, 29.

† Whitman does not leave this doctrine of "suggestion" to be inferred. (*Cf.* Pr., pp. 483 and 493; L. of G., p. 434.)

‡ *Cf.* on writing for the public. (Pr., p. 497.)

in beauty or originality always arouses something disagreeable and repulsive." (Pr., p. 482.) In this we can not but agree with him. But we are still not wholly convinced that any true theory of composition can justify some things in Leaves of Grass. In fact we are sure that whenever Whitman was most consistent with an extreme doctrine of "suggestion" he utterly failed in his purpose. To men endowed with a quick, pictorial imagination, page-long catalogues of geographical and physiological names may conceivably be a source of extreme delight, and amount to a trip around the world, or to the possession of a wonderful human body translucent, nay transparent for the investigator's eye. To most men, however, these catalogues are a "*reductio ad absurdum*" of the theory.* They mean little or nothing at all. They are simply a weariness to the flesh. Nothing perhaps has more contributed to heap deserved ridicule on Whitman.

True that a so-called " negligent list of one after

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* Sydney Lanier's use of the " catalogue " in the " Symphony " is very astonishing and effective. Each name a note as it were. We can not but honestly admit a feeling that the disciple here succeeded where the master failed.

Speaking of Sydney Lanier, were not those clever would-be destructive paragraphs in his "English Novel" a somewhat ungenerous attempt to conceal from himself and his readers his own evident indebtedness, in his best poetry, to the rugged singer of "athletic manhood?" Poor, sick Sydney Lanier! How such a line as "only health puts one rapport with the universe" must have stung him! But old Walt can well afford to be magnanimous, and wholly ignores his impertinent critique, including Lanier's in the list of names for which he has a " heart-benison " and " reverence for their memories," " the galaxy of the past." (*Cf.* Pr., pp. 481–482.)

another as I happen to call them to me or think of them" (p. 89) is not without an inner law, but it is one of purely personal association and therefore to us readers in all probability an unintelligible law. For him the beads maybe made a necklace, but he has cut the string and hurried the beads helter skelter into our lap. There is no use pretending that we shall re-string them. We do not. But, when the list is systematic, then we are still more annoyed. We feel that he is tricking us. He has had a text-book conveniently at hand, surely, for reference, or his memory is really altogether too retentive.

We are not surprised that there should be much incoherence in chants professedly "ecstatic," but that the sentence form should be deliberately abandoned is somewhat amazing. For after all, if man occupies the central position in nature, which Whitman arrogates for him, he surely has a right to impose on nature the laws of his own being. It is quite true that things are not respectively subjects and objects set off against one another, distinguished from all other things, and fettered in unique relations, represented by verbs hovering between subjects and objects. Nevertheless it is useless to defy man's mental constitution. If Whitman does not make sentences for us, we must, mentally at least, make sentences for ourselves out of his fragments. Still, again, we ought to admit with all candor that a breathless speed, a sense of kaleidoscopic change, are often effects apparently due to this rejection of the sentence-form; and we would venture to suggest that whenever Whitman deliberately constructed a catalogue, or refused to form sentences, he failed of his

purpose, and deserved to fail, but when the verbal incoherency, the bombardment of independent nouns was a necessity imposed from within, he succeeded in producing the desired result.

Poetic style, when *addressed to the soul,* is less definite form, outline, sculpture, and becomes vista, music, half tints, and even less than half tints. True, it may be architecture; but again it maybe the forest wild wood, or the best effect thereof at twilight, the waving oaks, and cedars in the wind, and the impalpable odor. (Pr., p. 287.)

The general truth of this we may admit. We may give up the "garden" (Pr., p. 497) for the roadside mob of wild flowers; with him, we may prefer the Rocky Mountains to a row of pyramids and obelisks (Pr., p. 143), and yet might we not protest that every thing man makes must have a beginning, a middle and an end, a center and a circumference? After all, as said above, man imposes on the wildest landscape laws of perspective that reduce it to human comprehension. It would be more natural if we should emancipate things from this arbitrary tyranny, but how can we be *thus* "faithful to things" (p. 271) without failing to reject "whatever insults" our souls (p. 273), both which are imperative commands of Whitman to the true Poet of Democracy? (Pr., p. 265–6.) Whitman's best poems are neither chaotic, nor mechanically symmetrical. They are true organisms. They are sons of his spirit "begotten, not made."

Rhymes and rhymers pass away, poems distilled from poems pass away,
The swarms of reflectors and the polite pass, and leave ashes,
Admirers, importers, obedient persons, make but the soil of literature. (p. 272.)

We would not for one moment have Whitman

less arrogant, defiant. We have too much enjoyed, in sympathy, his great declaration of independence. We would boldly assert that it is good, very good, indeed, that Whitman abandoned the old forms of "arbitrary and rhyming metre." We are willing he should "soar to the freer, vast, diviner heaven of prose." We are quite satisfied, provided his work is as he himself demands "subtly and necessarily, always rhythmic" . . . "distinguishable easily enough." (Pr., p. 323.) This it is not always. It does not always "soar." It often has no wings at all. It sometimes falls far below the veriest flats of prose. Is Matthew Arnold's Philomela verse? and therefore poetry? Then quite as surely must Whitman's good work be recognized as poety, even if Sidney and Shelley be vociferously voted heretics by a majority of critics for calling Plato a poet, though he wrote in prose. Rhythm is the pulse of poetry; should it not then quicken with emotion, become sluggish almost suspended, with the feeling of inner stillness; or should it by its clock-like regularity argue the mere abstractness of the poem, our utter indifference to it, the entire lack of vital sympathy between spirit and form, making the form not a living expressive body, but a lifeless vessel wholly unconcerned with the nature of its contents?* To quote superb instances from Whitman would be a delightful and extremely easy task.

* Again, in this matter of "organic form," Lanier has grasped the same idea as Whitman. "Corn" and two of his "Hymns to the Marshes," in some respects his very best work, have, preserving rhyme, and with an over-use, perhaps, of alliteration, utterly abandoned metre of a fixed kind, and an arbitrary stanza, while the rhythm is made to impart the mood.

Whitman rarely spoils good matter with bad form; it is because matter unfit for use, or such as he at all events did not know how to use, is mixed with it, that there are gaps, bottomless pits of—not prose—but something as much below plain prose as his levels and heights are above it. As for his vocabulary, no one will say that Whitman was a slavish "follower of beauty," though, again, he was not always her "august master." (p. 137.) He is right, no doubt, in saying that "slang" is an "attempt" "to escape from bald literalism, and express itself illimitably" made by common humanity; but, is it a successful attempt always, and is *common* humanity to be the measure of "the Answerer?" If we are to see ourselves glorified in him, he must be above our faults, succeed easily where we fail. Barbaric importations,* words ruthlessly mutilated, a disregard for the associative atmosphere of words, are complaints easily lodged against our poet. We do wish he had not given the adversary so much occasion to blaspheme. We love the man, we reverence his purpose. One who prefers *me*, the reader, to his own poem, I will endure much from—things at the hand of another wholly beyond a moment's sufferance. Why "meat of a man?" Would not "flesh" do? Why "Ma femme" for "bride" or "wife?" Why "rapport" for "touch" or "sympathy?"† Why some of the

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* If Whitman hoped these foreign words used occasionally would serve to express the composite nature of the American people, he failed signally. Could we assimilate as ill our immigrants as Whitman's English does these unhappy foreign words, our people would indeed become a crazy quilt!

† In his prose, terrific expressions abound: "toploftical,"

words that have appeared, in spite of all efforts to exclude such disturbers of the peace, in the quotations made in this paper? We can only, as lovers of Whitman, regret them. We shall learn not to notice them. Why a plural verb with a singular subject, or the reverse? Why "ye" with a singular noun in an apostrophe? Such trifles sour the temper of the new reader, and make proselyting no easy affair. And who, having felt that Whitman has done him good, does not wish to do a little private unostentatious proselyting?

"SO LONG."

Is it necessary to point out in conclusion what are Whitman's successes artistically? Perhaps a list of poems to read might well be constructed, though we now have from Mr. Arthur Stedman a selection which can be obtained in America.* Englishmen have been more fortunate.† Not that I could spare any thing from Whitman's volume, but there is a good deal in it that is rather strong meat for babes, and for my part I should like to put Whitman's book into the hands of babes.

Crossing Brooklyn Ferry—A Song of Joys—Song of the Universal—To You—Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking—Tears—To the Man-of-Warbird

"civilizee," cohered out of," "literatuses," "fetching up at," "technists," "admirant toward," "arrière," (= background), etc.

* Also "Gems from Whitman," by Elizabeth Porter.

Prof. Oscar L. Triggs, of Chicago University, is now engaged upon a long needed "Primer to Whitman."

† Selections of Walt Whitman's poems, edited with introduction by Wm. M. Rossetti. Chatto & Windus, London, 1886.

"Whitman" (selections), edited by Ernest Rhys, in Canterbury Poets. Walter Scott, London.

—On the Beach at Night—The World Below the Brine—On the Beach at Night Alone—Gods—Beat! Beat! Drums!—The Artillery Man's Vision—WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOORYARD BLOOMED—This Compost—Warble for Lilac-time—Sparkles from the Wheel —The Ox-tamer—PASSAGE TO INDIA—PRAYER OF COLUMBUS—A Noiseless Patient Spider—Thou Orb Aloft Full-dazzling—THE MYSTIC TRUMPETER—To a Locomotive in Winter—A Riddle Song—Old War Dreams —Ashes of Soldiers—CAMPS OF GREEN—Halcyon Days —WITH HUSKY, HAUGHTY LIPS, O SEA.

This list, by no means of course complete, is made with reference to the reader. Nothing in these, we fancy, can possibly give him any reasonable offense. If he has come to enjoy all of these, let him trust himself to the sea. He may swallow a little brine, but he will not drown.

It is altogether of no use to praise. Praise seems impertinent to him who has enjoyed, and foolish to the prejudiced or unfortunate person who can not sympathize. Suffice it to say that minor difficulties will settle themselves in time for the student. "With care for a man or book such would be surmounted, and without it, what avails the faultlessness of either?" No more appropriate words here than these of Robert Browning concerning his Sordello. The greatest difficulties are for the most part in the reader. Walt Whitman never claimed to be more than a pioneer. He tells us that in his work "the words" are nothing, the drift "every thing." (p. 17.) Then, too, all his "chants" may not be for you. "Each for its kind" (p. 23) says he; mine for me, therefore, and yours for you. No doubt he is quite

ready to "offer his style to any one" (p. 380) and be surpassed by the humblest reader. (*Cf.* p. 74.) Undoubtedly some of us who have been brought up in hot-houses will feel uncomfortable in his open air, but, after the first horror is over, the sensation of limitless freedom will probably seem pleasant if anything.

As to morals—and decency—of course no one can answer such objections. I for one should allow them to remain insuperable. If your morals and your modesty should be in imminent danger because forsooth Whitman, like your physician, knows you have a body, and, like your conscience, is sure you have sinned enough not to cast stones at the most degraded brother or sister, is it with him, forsooth, you are going to be angry when he lets "nature speak with original energy?" (p. 27) when he makes his song and you meet "the facts face to face?" (p. 271.) Do you suppose Whitman never had any qualms about his "Adamic" songs? (*Cf.* Pr., p. 191.) If against the wishes of dear friends he would not consent to their suppression he must have thought he had a good reason. He explains himself fully on this point in "Ventures on an old Theme." (Pr., p. 322.) If he eliminated the "stock poetic expressions" so dear to you, it will perhaps comfort you to know it cost him a great deal of trouble to do this. (Pr., pp. 20, 518.) If, wishing "the strength of health," not of "delirium" (Pr., p. 157), he sometimes gives you what he terms the "drench of passions" "life coarse and rank" (p. 94), it is better than if he had indulged you in spiced innuendos and prurient proprieties. If he annoys you by his perpetual cheer, if in your fits

of cultured listlessness or philosophic despondency he positively irritates you by giving "himself the benefit of the doubt," and insisting that he is happy unless he is very sure indeed of the contrary (Pr., p. 92), it may perhaps be a pleasant thought to you that he at times felt "these modern tendencies to turn every thing to pathos, ennui, morbidity, dissatisfaction, death." (Pr., p. 109.) Thirty years of ill health could not break his spirit. He insisted that "in the fact of life itself" we should "discover and achieve happiness." (Pr., p. 249.)

Do you say, O all this optimism would be well in Millennial days, not now? Well, he will tell you it is good to live in the future. It is magnificent to have occasion for the "afflatus" to fall on you, it is glorious to hear the "holy ghost" speak within, to have the "prophetic vision." (Pr., p. 227.)

If you are angered by his self-sufficiency, and fancy he means really to repel you, it will be well to remember that "though the live-oak glistens" solitary, Whitman knows very well that he at all events "could not without a friend, a lover near." (p. 106.) If you wish he had been a greater scholar, like yourself very learned, incapable of technical blunders even when off his guard, you will be apt to forgive him when you consider how on the occasion of his remark that Browning "must be deeply studied out" and "quite certainly repays the trouble," he frankly admitted that he for his part was "too old and indolent," that he could not "study" and "in fact *never*" had "studied." (Pr., p. 483.)

After all Whitman is what he is. If you want him to take you by the hand he will do it in his own

hearty, rough way. He will not shake your arm out of joint, but no one can promise that your monocle will not be dislodged from its supercilious place;—and who would venture his reputation as a prophet by assuring you that your immaculate shirt bosom will suffer no rumples if he should happen to put his big brawny arms about you?

In conclusion, you may ask me, why can I not get the same thing Whitman gives from another—say, Emerson or Browning? Well, perhaps *you* can. The fact however is that Emerson's words sound impersonal, abstract and cold—vague, unreal—while there is no doubt you shall have to understand Whitman. He drives his ideas like wedges of live lightning into your soul. No shields or helmets or customary convention will protect it. You may walk with Browning (I say you *may*) and take an absurd delight in his difficulties as such, you may fancy all he says has reference only to this man or that woman—you *may* apply the sermon to your neighbor in the pew and remain Pharisaically content—you *may* look upon Browning's poetry only as an arsenal for controversial weapons, and use Elvire's husband's logic to justify your marital irregularities, or Bishop Blougram's arguments to fortify your soul in lucrative deceit—(I have known a bishop to quote his sophistries copiously, elaborately, in a defense of his own theological position!)—but one thing is very sure, Whitman's Message is to *you*. It is positively you he means. There is no doubt about this. When he lashes, it is you are hurt. When he mocks, it is you who feel rebuked. When he exults, it is you who are uplifted from the slough of your despond. When you try to pose as virtuous, it is you

he will denounce. If you are dealing in "doubts, swervings," and subtle "doublings upon" yourself "typical of our age" (Pr., p. 403), it is out of *you* he will "shame silliness" (p. 38) and make you very sure of yourself. If you are thinking of what a poor chance in life you have, he will tell you it is just what you make of it, and that you can be a hero, "a God" if you please. Now all this is said to *you*—unmistakably to *you*—and there is no possible evasion! How then can you afford to wrap yourself in a cloak of refined prejudices?

Stranger, if you passing meet me and desire to speak to me, why
should you not speak to me?
And why should I not speak to you? (p. 18.)

APPENDIX 1.

BYRON AS CHANTER OF PERSONALITY.

(See note ‡, page 77.)

As Chanter of personality Whitman had a predecessor in Lord Byron, the spell of whose poetry on his contemporaries was due in large measure to the novel importance accorded the "individual will." In the early romances the integrity of the individual was made to seem of more importance than moral laws. In Childe Harold's Pilgrimage we were given a passionate diary, and in Don Juan a sarcastic one, of that defiant individuality. In Manfred he appears as hero. The world can not yield him oblivion when too late he has found out that

> "The tree of knowledge is not that of life."

Nor can the beauty of it, for he would have to *surrender himself* to it—a thing he will not do. Every thing speaks to him of himself. Summoning to his aid magical powers, he brings before himself the shadow of Astarte, his beloved, for the destruction of whose happiness, it is, his soul is suffering perpetual torture. He has long ceased to justify "his" deeds "unto" himself—"the last *infirmity* of evil." All left to him is self-mastery, making:

> "His torture tributary to his *will*. . . ."
>
> "No other spirit . . . hath
> A soul like his—or *power upon his soul*."

For his power over spirits

> "Was purchased by no compact, . . .
> But by superior science."

He did not bow to Arimanes, prince of devils:

> "Bid *him* bow down to that which is above him
> The overruling Infinite . . .
> And we will kneel together."

He utterly rejects the comforts of Christianity, as hitherto understood, which are offered by the Abbot:

"Whate'er
I may have been, or am, doth rest between
Heaven and *myself*. I shall not choose a mortal
To be my mediator."

"There is no power . . .
Can exorcise . . .
From out the unbounded spirit, the quick sense
Of its own sins, wrongs, sufferance, and revenge
Upon itself; there is no future pang
Can deal that justice on the self-condemned
He deals on his own soul."

As he has refused the help of heaven, so does he defy the powers of hell:

"Away. I'll die as I have lived—*alone*. . . ."

"I do defy ye,—though I feel my soul
Is ebbing from me, yet I do defy ye; . . .
What ye take
Shall be ta'en limb by limb."

"I *stand*
Upon my strength—I do defy—deny—
Spurn back, and scorn ye!"

"Back to thy hell!
Thou hast no power upon me, *that* I feel;
Thou never shall possess me, *that* I know;
What I have done is done."

"Thou did'st not tempt me, and thou couldst not tempt me;
I have not been thy dupe, nor am thy prey—

But was my own destroyer, and will be
My own hereafter.—Back, ye baffled fiends!
The hand of Death is on me—but not yours!"

A strong protest all through, surely, against the immoral notion (however religious it may be) that we are but a battle-field for angels and devils! How wretched is he whose individuality and its exceeding pride sunders him from his fellows is also shown in Manfred. What draws us in Manfred is not however the fact of his misery, but his tremendous sense of responsibility, his indomitable courage, his determination for good or ill to be *himself*, and to consider no dastardly escape—putting his guilt on an inno-

cent Savior—as worthy of a man; yet at the same time equally prepared to extirpate the cowardice that would throw the burden on evil spirits. For this powerful protest against whatever would destroy the dignity of the soul, we must honor Byron, and realize fully the advance that has been made in this direction when we compare the last scene of Manfred with the pitiful moral break-down of Faustus in the great Marlowe's drama, which does duty for catastrophe, and has been so extravagantly praised, not, alas, always for its poetry, but for the indirect tribute it is supposed to pay to a moribund theology. Does poor Kit turn in his grave, when that scene is *thus* praised?

APPENDIX 2.

A Hostile Critique on Whitman.

(See note *, page 10.)

The Apostle of Chaotism. The University of the South Magazine, predecessor of the Sewanee Review, May, 1890:

"We have before us a book, and one, whatever may be said of it, unique in character. It purports to contain poetry. Capitals at the beginning of jagged lines inform the eye of that deliberate intention. The whole is launched defiantly into the world. From hearsay we gather that Wordsworth's prophecy has been at length fulfilled. Surely, he who chanted immortality of idiot boys and Peter Bells would hail this robust disciple of his theory who uses the language of semi-cultivated men to express life as fully as he perceives it, unflinchingly, forcibly, without regard to aesthetic or ethical conventions, a prophet superior to all time-honored artifice. The Master put great faith in his reader's longevity, the more advanced Disciple, in his unliability to nausea. . . . Was the book written solely to obtain notoriety for one who had vainly striven after legitimate fame? To be novel at any price was his purpose, think you? To disprove Solomon's wisdom by letting the sun shine on something new? All had been tried that seemed not in absolute violation of beauty and decency. There remained for an ambitious conqueror only what had been hitherto contemned. Better be king of gutter-filth and "fœtor," to plant one's foot on the world's dung-hill, than to cower, one of many, be they never so noble, or to be jostled on the

thronged steps of shining temples where none seem great but the superhuman."

"I am willing to wait to be understood by the growth of the taste of myself." So a dim hope is really extended to us, lest we might fancy ignorance and folly were trying to pass for inspiration, thanks to a veil of chaotic incomprehensibility, and that for aught we knew a maniac might be the veiled prophet!

Any definition of verse stricter than one which might admit the *best* utterances of Whitman, would exclude those of David, Solomon, Ezekiel, Job, and St. John the Divine.

"Faces so pale with wondrous eyes, very dear, gather closer yet
Draw close, but speak not.
Phantoms of countless lost,
Invisible to the rest, henceforth my companions,
Follow me ever—desert me not while I live.
Sweet are the blooming checks of the living—sweet are the musical voices sounding,
But sweet, ah, sweet are the dead with their silent eyes!"

Will this be prose, and Matthew Arnold's "Philomela" verse, and consequently poetry? Read the closing strophe of the "Passage to India." Do you pronounce it utterly prose? Has it not more fire than much American "poetry?"

Verse of English poets has hitherto been rhythmic within metric limits somewhat arbitrarily adopted, but once adopted, inviolable. Here we have language intended to be rhythmic without such fixed metric limits. Shall then the *best* utterances of Whitman be confined forever deep in a Dantesque hell of prose, without hope of purgatory or heaven? Had we only these *best* utterances, a case *might* be made. Doubtless, Whitman conscientiously thought that, except in those rare cases where he rhymed intentionally, he had succeeded in casting all forms to the wind. To obey any restrictions, whether of fair precedent or reason, would have been quite inconsistent in the "Adamic" citizen and "chanter" of these states; hence he resolved to take his natural limitations for his only law. Nevertheless, to say that he "escaped form" were absurd. Whenever he is most harmonious, he can be scanned, and we can not doubt but that in his heart he preferred those passages. Furthermore, he is fast bound in the

most illiberal of mannerisms. Having rejected meters, he adopted as his perpetual style ejaculatory abruptness, impassioned contempt for grammar and logic. Anacolouthon transfigured is his favorite mold for "ecstatic chants." Miltonic latinisms sorely out of atmosphere; barbarisms that career through his pages like Huns putting all harmony to fire and sword; vulgarities that rasp and rip; inconceivable pilings of detached words, formless pyramids without visible apex or foundation, very towers of Babel with plentiful confusion of tongues—English Spanish, French, and Slang—to the utter consternation of the reader, and the temporary prostration of his aesthetic and moral judgment. Let us see what is possible to this contemner of style. Why, a frenetic upward flight of nine hundred and fifteen words—no rest, no real connection—a thunder-cloud of crows to obscure the sun, and deafen the earth with hoarse cries. Here is the peccant period, yet innocent compared with some of its Kith and Kin. (Song of Myself, Strophe, 33.)

In "Salût au Monde" we are regaled with geography ecstatics insane, and foaming at the mouth:—nations, cities, rivers, mountains, all in a stupendous whirl of incoherence, introduced by 8 *Walt Whitman's*, 18 *I hears*, 16 *I sees*, 2 *I beholds* (on account of the word's superior rarity patronizing 9 *some* clauses), 19 *others*, 2 *wait ats*, with a redoubtable array of cities, 50 *I sees*, 5 *I am coverings*, with 24 cities, 1 *I belong in* with 7, 1 *I descend* with a full stop. Then with renewed ardor, having touched ground, 12 *I sees*, 1 *I look on*, 1 *I see at*, 1 *I look on*, 8 *I sees*, 27 exclamatory *yous*, 2 *all yous*, 2 *and yous*, 5 *each of us's* 18 *yous*, 2 *I do's*, etc., etc. This is climax without doubt, but with respect to infinite distances, where parallel lines meet and other strange things will occur from time to time; ay, a climax, to be sure, leviathen-like and choice! . . .

We begin to understand his poetic rapacity and would be led to fancy the digestive powers of his "omnivorous" lines excellent, but for "*belched* words." And yet he says: "I have offered my *style* to every one!" For him the muses are undaunted Bacchantes, hands gored with the blood of Orpheus, feet frantic around the huge anacolouthon which serves for throne to Jove, shouting insanely and tossing out their hydrophobic carols.

As has been implied, his Rhapsodies are for the most part didactic. Very much precious time is spent in assuring us with exquisite irrelevancy that he sings. Could frequent reiteration

change falsehood into truth, some would doubtless become convinced of that would-be fact. It is no exaggeration to state that his usual song consists in saying over and over again that he is about to sing, and cataloguing the subjects of future "recitatives," "ecstatic songs," "chants," and "carols." Evidently this ends in becoming more *formal* even than the stilted invocations which Byron satirized in "Hail, muse, etc., we left Don Juan."

Sympathy and manliness (although the former is often unbearably blasphemous and the latter brutal, or bestial), are his most captivating qualities."

Alas! Who, or rather *what*, is his God? . . . It is universally inclusive—a sort of *aqua regia* that dissolves all heterogeneous substance into homogeneous (protoplasmic?) liquid, which may be taken like a patent medicine for all soul and skin diseases in homoeopathic doses. "Why should I pray? Why should I venerate and be ceremonious? . . . I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones." In my case, I should prefer that interesting comparison to be *post-mortem*. "And I say to mankind, be not curious about God." "I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four." "I find letters from God dropped in the street," thanks to a trans-stellar postal service, "and every one signed by God's name." We believe we have reached a materialistic pantheism with a ubiquitous quasi-gazeous "deus *in* machina." In spite of lack of "curiosity," like Mephistopheles he likes to keep on good terms "with the Old Man" (we quote from Goethe), and so the average man represented by Walt Whitman pays occasionally a personal visit to his Collective or Average God. "My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain!"

I this (referring to the Square Deific) the sublimity of drunkenness? Nay, hear this Vesuvian burst of adoration: "Santa Spirita," etc., etc.

Let us follow him step by step, from his Nihilistic Theology and Chaotistic Ethics, to his more positive creed: "Knowing the perfect fitness of things, while they discuss I am silent and go and bathe and admire myself." "To look on my rose-colored flesh! . . . To be this incredible God I am!" Lo, Polyphemus, his only eye put out by Lust, playing at Narcissus by the stream side! "If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the

spread of my body or any part of it, etc., etc.;" for, then, in spite of the Doctrine of Indifference, dinned in our ears over and over again, he specializes from his belligerent Pan-Fetichism with an incredible enthusiasm; and, after substituting "meat" for "flesh," "procreation" for "creation," "breeding" for "love" in the technical terminology, and furthermore, supplementing it with a munificent new vocabulary of hilarious diabolism, he attempts to establish in utterly unquotable ravings his more perfectly evolved system of Neo-phallicism.

Yea, thou prophet, thou Apostle of Chaotism, we greet thee! Hail, thou that art—nay, let us grow calm—only a man, rude, and glorying in his rudeness; crude, and magnifying crudeness; daring, brutal, sympathic, bestial, atheistic, nihilistic, socialistic, American, cosmopolitan, materialistic, mystic, dreamer, ranter—nay, let us not call him fool, let us not call him maniac,—only the benign Apostle of Chaotism! He who finds "humanity" too narrow a term and would substitute "animality," which is less exclusive!

This rhapsodist, this poet (if we may call a sewer-rat astray in the secret parts of Parnassus by such names), although he is ever raving of this land, God be praised, he is *not* representative of these States, nor of Canada (spelt with a K), nor of the Pottawattami Indians, primitive though they be. He does not stand for America, nor for this age, nor for mankind in any historic age. Catullus, Boccaccio, Rabelais, were prudes-among-Puritans to him. He is a monstrosity that can be classed in no known geological age, nor Pliocene, nor Miocene; but in one only, of which he is the sole relic, and which by analogy to these we might term conveniently the *Obscene*.

ERRATA.

Page 30, line 10, for "happy" read "unhappy."
Page 37, line 8, for "purient" read "prurient."
Page 49, line 5, for "literary" read "literally."
Page 63, line 30, for "p. 814" read "p. 80."
Page 84, last line, for "pp. 255-259" read "pp. 32-34."
Page 104, line 30, for "I this" read "Is this."

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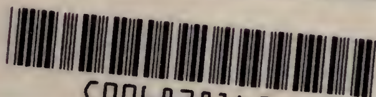
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