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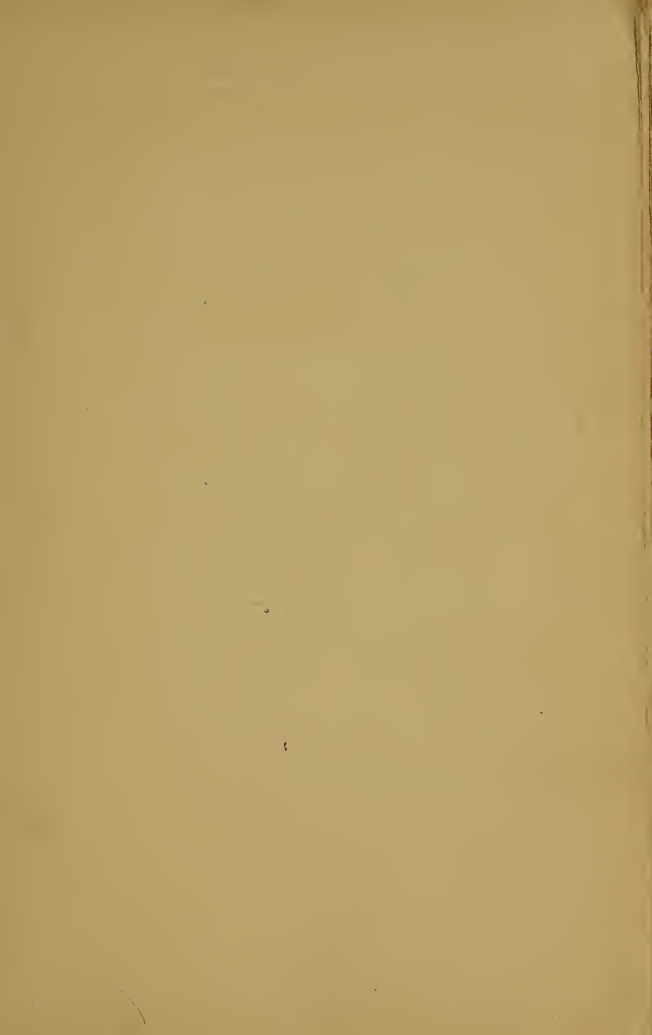
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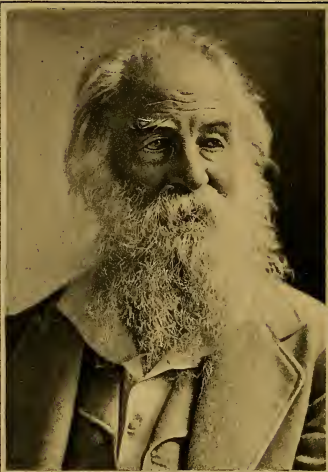
WALT WHITMAN

BY

ISAAC HULL PLATT







Walt Whitman

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# WALT WHITMAN

BY

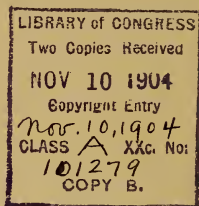
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Published November, 1904

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*The frontispiece to this volume is from a photograph by Sarony in 1879. Sarony made a number of portraits of Whitman, of which this one, although perhaps the least known, seems to possess qualities which render it especially suitable for its present use. Taken at the period when Whitman came nearest to a restoration to health after his paralysis in 1873, it unites with the venerable and patriarchal appearance of his later years much of the robustness of physique which is shown in his earlier portraits. The original photograph is in the Whitman collection of the late Dr. R. M. Bucke. The present engraving is by John Andrew & Son, Boston.*



IN MEMORIAM

RICHARD MAURICE BUCKE



## PREFACE

*This little book is an attempt to bring into brief compass the salient features of the life of one who — whatever else may be claimed for or denied him — is among the most picturesque figures in American Letters. If it shall prove to be of aid to those who are curious in regard to Whitman's life and work or useful as an epitome to those who are already familiar with the subject, it will have done all that it is asked to do.*

*While I have approached my task as an unqualified admirer of Whitman and a believer to the fullest extent in the greatness of his work, I, of course, recognize that there are other honest ways of looking at the subject, and that there are many people who admit his essential greatness in spite of certain elements in his work of which they do not approve, or which they even find offensive. Standing in the position I do, while I hope I have succeeded in making my critical remarks upon Whitman's work*

*dispassionate, I feel sure that I have stated the facts of his life without prejudice.*

*Among published books, in addition to the various editions of Whitman's works, I am principally indebted to Dr. Bucke's "Walt Whitman," John Burroughs' "Walt Whitman as Poet and Person" and his "Walt Whitman, a Study," William Sloane Kennedy's "Walt Whitman," and the memorial volume "In Re Walt Whitman" which was edited by Whitman's literary executors. For personal advice and assistance I make my acknowledgments to Thomas B. Harned and Horace Traubel, the surviving literary executors of the poet, and to Laurens Maynard. To the latter I am indebted especially for assistance in preparing the chronology and bibliography.*

ISAAC HULL PLATT.

WALLINGFORD, PENNSYLVANIA,

October 1, 1904.



## CHRONOLOGY

1819

*May* 31. Walt Whitman was born at West Hills, near Huntington, Long Island, New York.

1823

His family removed to Brooklyn.

1825-32

Attended the public schools of Brooklyn, working for a short time as errand-boy in a lawyer's office.

1833-34

Worked in Brooklyn printing-offices, learning the trade.

1836-39

Taught several terms in country schools on Long Island, after which he opened a printing-office in Huntington, Long Island, starting a new weekly paper, *The Long Islander* (still published).

1840-47

Returned to New York, and worked at

printing. Spent several summers in the country at farm work.

Published *Franklin Evans* in *The New World* (1841).

Contributed essays and tales to *The Democratic Review*.

1848

Became editor of *The Brooklyn Eagle*.

1848-49

Started with his brother "Jeff" on a long working journey through the Middle and Southern States as far as New Orleans, where he worked for some time on the editorial staff of *The Crescent*.

1850-51

Returned to Brooklyn, working his way back through the Northern States and Canada.

Published a newspaper in Brooklyn, *The Freeman*.

1851-54

Worked with his father in Brooklyn, building and selling houses.

1855

Published first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, New York, no publisher).

*July*. Death of his father.

*July 21*. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote to him, praising the book.

1856

Visited in Brooklyn by Emerson, and later by Thoreau.

Published second edition of *Leaves of Grass* (New York, no publisher).

1860

Visited Boston, and published third edition of *Leaves of Grass* (Boston, Thayer & Eldridge).

1862

Went to Fredericksburg (Virginia) to attend his brother George, wounded in battle.

1862-65

Remained at the army hospitals in and near Washington, ministering to the sick and wounded.

1862-65 (*continued*)

Became intimately acquainted with John Burroughs, William Douglas O'Connor, and Peter Doyle.

1865

Appointed to a clerkship in the Department of the Interior.

*June 30.* Dismissed from his position by James Harlan, Secretary of the Interior, "for having written an immoral book."

Appointed immediately to another clerkship in the Attorney-General's office.

*September 2.* William Douglas O'Connor published *The Good Gray Poet*, a defence of Whitman and an attack on Secretary Harlan.

Published *Drum Taps* and *Sequel to Drum Taps* (New York, no publisher).

1867

Published fourth edition of *Leaves of Grass* (New York, no publisher).

John Burroughs published *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person*.

1868

William Michael Rossetti edited *Poems of Walt Whitman* for English publication (London, J. C. Hotten).

1869

*June-July.* Mrs. Anne Gilchrist wrote her letters to Rossetti, appreciations of *Leaves of Grass*.

1871

*September 7.* Read poem at the opening of the American Institute at New York. Published this as *After All, Not to Create Only* (Boston, Roberts Brothers).

Published two brochures, *Passage to India* and *Democratic Vistas* (Washington, no publisher).

Published fifth edition of *Leaves of Grass* (Washington, no publisher).

1872

*June 26.* Read Commencement poem at Dartmouth College, "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free." Published under the same title in a small volume with other poems (Washington, no publisher).

1873

*January 22.* Prostrated by paralysis at Washington.

*May 23.* Death of his mother at Camden (New Jersey).

Removed to Camden, thenceforth his home for the remainder of his life.

1874-75

Passed through a hard struggle with his sickness.

1876

Published sixth (centennial) edition of *Leaves of Grass* and a uniform volume, *Two Rivulets*, composed of prose and new poems (Camden, author's edition).

Received substantial returns from the sale of this edition in England, and many encouraging letters from the most important English authors.

1877-78

Recovered partially from his prostration by living much in the open air in the country.

## CHRONOLOGY

xvii

1879

*April* 14. Delivered for the first time his address on Abraham Lincoln in the Metropolitan Opera House at New York.

*September*. Made a long Western journey as far as the Rocky Mountains.

1880

*April* 15. Delivered lecture on Lincoln in Chestnut Street Opera House, Philadelphia.

*June*. Visited Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke at London, Ontario, and journeyed with him through Canada.

1881

*October*. Visited Boston to attend to the issuing of the seventh edition of *Leaves of Grass* (James R. Osgood & Co.).

Visited Concord as the guest of Frank B. Sanborn, and was entertained at dinner by Emerson and his family.

1882

*March*. Prosecution of Osgood & Co. for publication of *Leaves of Grass* threatened

by District Attorney Oliver Stevens. Whitman purchased plates and copies on Osgood's refusal to continue publication.

Published eighth edition of *Leaves of Grass* from same plates without alteration (Philadelphia, Rees, Welsh & Co., afterwards David McKay).

Published *Specimen Days and Collect* (Philadelphia, same publishers).

1883

Richard Maurice Bucke published *Walt Whitman*.

1884-87

Remained in Camden in steadily declining health.

1887

Attended a reception given in his honor by the Contemporary Club of Philadelphia.

1888

*November 2.* Brought near to death by a fresh attack of paralysis.



1888 (*continued*)

Published *November Boughs* (Philadelphia, McKay).

Published *Complete Poems and Prose* in one volume (personally issued and handled by Whitman).

1889

*May* 31. Appeared at a public dinner given by citizens of Camden in honor of his seventieth birthday.

Published as a birthday souvenir the ninth edition of *Leaves of Grass*, a limited pocket edition, including "Sands at Seventy" and "A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads."

1890

*April* 15. Read his Lincoln Address at a reception given him by the Contemporary Club.

*May* 31. Attended birthday dinner at Reisser's in Philadelphia, where he discussed Immortality with Ingersoll.

1891

*May 31.* Birthday dinner held at Whitman's home by a notable company.

*October 21.* Attended Ingersoll's lecture, *Liberty in Literature*, given for his benefit at Horticultural Hall, Philadelphia. Last appearance in public.

*December.* Published *Good-Bye my Fancy* (Philadelphia, McKay) and immediately afterwards the tenth edition of *Leaves of Grass* (same publisher), the final proofs being passed by him while on his death-bed.

1892

*January.* Published *Complete Prose Works*, uniform with tenth edition of *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia, McKay).

*March 26.* Walt Whitman died at Camden, New Jersey.

*March 30.* Buried at Harleigh Cemetery, near Camden, addresses being made by Robert G. Ingersoll, Daniel G. Brinton, Thomas B. Harned, and Richard M. Bucke.

1893.

John Addington Symonds published *Walt Whitman: A Study*.

1894

May 31. The Walt Whitman Fellowship (International) organized at Philadelphia. (This association has continually since 1894 held annual meetings in Philadelphia, in Boston, or in New York on each anniversary of Whitman's birth.)

1896

John Burroughs published *Whitman, a Study*.

1897

*Calamus* (letters written by Walt Whitman to Peter Doyle) published (Boston, Laurens Maynard).

The eleventh edition of *Leaves of Grass*, including "Old Age Echoes" (posthumous additions) published (Boston, Small, Maynard & Co.).

1898

The second edition of *Complete Prose*

*Works*, uniform with eleventh edition of *Leaves of Grass*, published (Boston, same publishers).

*The Wound Dresser* (Whitman's hospital letters in war time) published (Boston, same publishers).

1902

*The Writings of Walt Whitman* published in ten volumes as a limited subscription edition (New York and London, G. P. Putnam's Sons).

1904

*Walt Whitman's Diary in Canada*, edited by William Sloane Kennedy, and *An American Primer*, edited by Horace Traubel, published (both Boston, Small, Maynard & Co.).

WALT WHITMAN



## WALT WHITMAN.

### I. PAUMANOK AND MANHATTAN.

*Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan  
the son.* \_\_\_\_\_

*As I pass O Manhattan, your frequent and  
swift flash of eyes offering me love,  
Offering me response to my own—these  
repay me.*

LONG ISLAND, or to call it by its Indian name that Whitman so dearly loved, Paumanok, stretches from New York Bay eastward for about one hundred and thirty miles, its average breadth being about ten miles. It is, as Whitman describes it, fish-shaped, Brooklyn representing the head, while the eastern end divides into two peninsulas to form the tail. The southern of these, stretching far out into the Atlantic, terminates in Montauk Point, a bold headland where Whitman pictures himself standing, "as on some mighty eagle's beak." This promontory forms

the end of the island's backbone which begins with the "beautiful hills of Brooklyn."

South of this range of hills the country is nearly level and the soil sandy. Along the southern coast extends a series of broad, shallow lagoons, like the lagoon at Venice, the largest of them known as the Great South Bay. South of these bays, or lagoons, is a long narrow strip of sand, or "Lido," caressed by Atlantic's breezes and pounded by his storm waves. The bays are a famous resort for aquatic birds, and formerly the waters teemed with fish. The bay men, a rough, hardy race, occupied themselves with fishing, lobster-catching, oyster-raising, and clam-digging. The northern shore, bordering on Long Island Sound, is a beautiful, gently rolling, well-wooded country, and in the early years of the nineteenth century was one of the most fertile and prosperous farming regions on the sea-



board. It is deeply indented by harbors, and at the head of one of the finest of these stands the little town of Huntington. Such was the environment into which Walt Whitman was born, and these were his frequent haunts for over forty years.

The region about Huntington was settled early in the seventeenth century by two different streams of immigration, one coming from England, by way of Massachusetts and Connecticut, the other from Holland, by way of New Amsterdam.

The Rev. Zachariah Whitman, born in England in 1595, came to this country in 1635, and established himself in Milford, Connecticut. Some time before 1660 his son Joseph crossed Long Island Sound to Huntington. Either he or one of his immediate descendants bought the farm at West Hills, three miles south of the village of Huntington, where Walt Whitman was born. At

about the time of the arrival of Joseph Whitman there appears the first record of the family of Van Velsor, of Dutch extraction, at Cold Spring Harbor, a few miles west of Huntington. During the generations between 1660 and 1820 each family was represented by substantial, prosperous, hard-working farmers, with occasionally a "captain" of one of the ships which constituted that old merchant marine, of which the country was so justly proud in the days before the government decided that commerce was a crime to be suppressed by tariff and navigation laws.

Yet another branch of Whitman's ancestry should be mentioned. His maternal grandmother was Amy (Naomi) Williams, of a Quaker family, also long resident in the region. Thus Walt combined the elements of Pilgrim, of Dutch, and of Quaker descent.

Walter Whitman, who was a carpenter and builder as well as a farmer, married

Louisa Van Velsor in 1816, and of the nine children of the marriage Walt was the second. He was born on the ancestral farm, May 31, 1819.

The farm is beautifully situated among the hills which form the backbone of the island and there are spots upon or near it commanding views of both the ocean to the south and Long Island Sound to the north. The house, a moderate-sized, comfortable, old-fashioned farmhouse, is still standing.

When Walt was less than five years old, the family moved to Brooklyn, where, with frequent visits to his birthplace and other parts of Long Island,—probably spending half his time there,—the lad grew to manhood. He attended the common schools of Brooklyn until he was thirteen, and then entered a printing-office to learn the trade. When he was about sixteen or seventeen, he taught school on Long Island. As a boy and young man, he was strong and active,

fond of sports, ball-playing and fishing being his favorites. He never went gunning.

A former pupil, Charles A. Roe, of Lakewood, New Jersey, thus gives some of his memories of him as schoolmaster: —

“I went to school to him in the town of Flushing, Long Island. He taught the school at Little Bay Side. We became very much attached to him.

“His ways of teaching were peculiar. He did not confine himself to books, as most of the teachers then did, but taught orally,—yes, had some original ideas, all his own. I know about that, for I had heard of others who tried oral teaching. But the plans he adopted were wholly of his own conception, and most successful.

“He was not severe with the boys, but had complete discipline in the school. Before and after school, and at recess, he was a boy among boys, always free, always easy, never stiff. He took active

part in games of frolic. It seemed his object to teach even when we played.

“Whitman never was trifling. I could see that he always kept in mind the serious nature of his task and its responsibility. At the same time he would never betray by anything in his manner that he felt above us or wished in any way to put on a tone or an air of superiority.

“Whitman was very fond of describing objects and incidents to the school. He would not do this privately, but to all hands. He would give quite a good deal of time to any subject that seemed worth while. He was always interesting, a very good talker, able to command the attention of scholars, of whom, by the way, there were seventy or eighty. Our ages ranged sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years old; yet many, too, were young shavers like myself.

“I never heard the least complaint of Walt from any scholar or from the par-

ents of any scholar. We were all deeply attached to him, and were sorry when he went away.

“The girls did not seem to attract him. He did not specially go anywhere with them or show any extra fondness for their society.

“His kindness, affability, his close association with us, were unusual and agreeable. Uniformly kind?—yes, without the least variation; always exactly the same.

“Walt was a good story-teller. Oh! excellent; was both funny and serious. Did I say he had his own notions how to punish a scholar? If he caught a boy lying, he exposed him before the whole school in a story. But the story was told without the mention of any names. No punishment beyond that. He had such a way of telling his story that the guilty fellow knew who was meant. He would do this in the case of any ordinary offence; but, if the offence was grave

enough, the whole school was taken into the secret.

“He was the soul of honor. If any one attempted anything dishonorable, he would be out on it at once. There was an examination or something. I had a paper with names on. I did not use it, but he saw the paper. After examination was over, and the school was about to be dismissed, he said he was sorry any scholar should do such a thing as this he had seen me do. He did not mention my name, but I know I never committed the offence again.

“My memory of Walt is acute, unusually acute,—probably because his personality had such a peculiar and powerful effect upon me, even as a boy. I had other teachers, but none of them ever left such an impress upon me. And yet I could not mention any particular thing. It was his whole air, his general sympathetic way, his eye, his voice, his entire geniality. I felt something I could not

describe. What I say, others will also say. I think he affected all as he did me. They have admitted it, yet, like me, can give no definite reasons. No one could tell why. Their memory of him is exactly like mine. There must be something in it ; it is not imagination.

“Whitman had dignity, and yet at the same time he could descend to sociability. The very moment he stepped across that school door-sill he was master. He had authority, but was not severe. We obeyed and respected him.

“One thing is sure. As far as Walt’s goodness of character goes, you can report me pretty fully and as strongly as you choose. Even back in the school-days, those of us who knew him, his scholars there on Long Island, felt, somehow, without knowing why, that here was a man out of the average, who strangely attracted our respect and affection.”

It was about this time that he began writing for newspapers and maga-



zines. In 1839 and 1840 he was at Huntington, editing *The Long Islander*, which he founded.

In October, 1894, Dr. Brinton with Horace Traubel and the present writer made a pilgrimage to Huntington and West Hills ; and Dr. Brinton elicited this information regarding Whitman and his association with the place : —

“Two of the forefathers of the hamlet clearly remembered his powerful personality, brimful of life, revelling in strength, careless of time and the world, of money and of toil, a lover of books and of jokes, delighting to gather round him the youth of the village in his printing-room of evenings and tell them stories and read them poetry, his own and others’. That of his own he called his ‘yawp,’ a word which he afterward made famous. Both remembered him as a delightful companion, generous to a fault, glorying in youth, negligent of his affairs, issuing *The Long Islander* at ran-

dom intervals,—once a week, once in two weeks, once in three,—until its financial backers lost faith and hope and turned him out, and with him the whole office corps; for Walt himself was editor, publisher, compositor, pressman, and printer's devil, all in one."

During his whole life Whitman seemed to give people the impression of having nothing to do at the very time that he was actually doing great quantities of work, and at this period he seems to have been regarded as something of a "loafer," not at all in a bad sense of the word, but as implied in his own expression, "I loaf and invite my soul." He was apparently quite indifferent to the attractions of women. One of our informants on this occasion, an old man who remembered him, said, "He seemed to hate women." This was undoubtedly an overstatement, but it at least goes to show that he did not make himself conspicuous with them. This is

significant in view of certain erroneous deductions that have been made from the earlier parts of *Leaves of Grass*.

About 1840 Whitman returned to Brooklyn. He was employed in printing-offices as a compositor, and afterward he was in business with his father as a house-builder. In 1848 and 1849 he was editor of *The Brooklyn Eagle*; but the growing arrogance of the slave power drove him from the Democratic party, with which he had been affiliated, and led to his severing his connection with the *Eagle* and to his writing the spirited verses known as "Blood Money," in fierce denunciation of those who, he felt, had proved traitors to the cause of freedom. During this period he was a frequent contributor to *The Democratic Review* and other periodicals. The contributions were short stories, rather forcibly told, and verses, clever and musical, but neither containing anything rising above the commonplace.

One of his productions about this time was *Franklin Evans*, a temperance tract. In after-years the recollection of this work was rather an annoyance to Whitman; and when, long after it was out of print, some of his friends instituted a search for a copy as a curiosity, he said he hoped to heaven they would never find it. They never did during his lifetime, but three or four copies have since been discovered.

Nothing seemed to delight him more than to mingle with and observe the crowds. His favorite perch was the seat with the driver on top of a Broadway omnibus, and the omnibus drivers were all his cronies. It is said that on one occasion when one of them, who had a family dependent upon him, became ill, Walt saved his place by driving for him for several months. This is apparently what gave rise to the story that he was in early life a "stage-driver." But the top of the omnibus was by no means his

only point of observation. He was a frequent attendant at the theatre and opera; and they seem, especially the latter, to have exercised a powerful formative influence upon his character. He was a constant frequenter of the old Park, the Bowery, Broadway, and Chatham Square Theatres and the Italian operas at Chambers Street, Astor Place, and the Battery. His favorites among the actors were Fanny Kemble, the elder Booth, and Edwin Forrest, and, among the singers, pre-eminently the great contralto, Alboni, whom he heard every time she sang in New York, and to whom he addressed the lines, "To a Certain Cantatrice." Another of his delights was the seashore, and he would lie for a whole summer's day on his back in the sand and bask in the sunshine, or shout Homer or Shakespeare to the breakers, or wander on the beach by night. The sights and sounds of nature and the human turmoil of the city

seemed equally to appeal to him and equally to be assimilated. He was as the child who went forth every day : all these became part of him. He would often cross the East River, in the pilot-house of a ferry-boat, back and forth for half a day or well into the night ; and the pilots and deck-hands were as great friends as the omnibus drivers. He relates that he was sometimes intrusted by the pilot with the wheel, until one day he narrowly escaped a collision, after which he desisted from this dangerous practice. Though not in the habit of attending church, he, even as a little boy, went a number of times to listen to Elias Hicks, as later he did to hear Father Taylor ; and he received a lifelong impression from each, as is indicated by his memoirs of them published in *November Boughs*, when Whitman was sixty-nine years old. He never was known to have many books, but he would spend a good deal of time

reading in the libraries of New York and Brooklyn.

Of the years from 1848 to 1855 he tells his own story: "In 1848, '49, I was occupied as editor of the 'daily Eagle' newspaper, in Brooklyn. The latter year went off on a leisurely journey and working expedition (my brother Jeff with me) through all the middle States, and down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. [In another place Whitman says the Southern trip was in '48.] Lived awhile in New Orleans, and work'd on editorial staff of 'daily Crescent' newspaper. After a time plodded back northward, up the Mississippi, and around to, and by way of the great lakes, Michigan, Huron, and Erie, to Niagara Falls and lower Canada, finally returning through central New York and down the Hudson; traveling altogether probably 8,000 miles this trip, to and fro. '51, '53, occupied in house-building in Brooklyn. (For a little of

the first part of that time in printing a daily and weekly paper, 'the Freeman.') '55, lost my dear father this year by death. Commenced putting 'Leaves of Grass' to press for good, at the job printing office of my friends, the brothers Rome, in Brooklyn, after many MS. doings and undoings—(I had great trouble in leaving out the stock 'poetical' touches, but succeeded at last.) I am now (1856-'7) passing through my 37th year."

Some time previous to this latter date, probably about 1850, he seemed of a sudden to broaden and deepen immensely. He became less interested in what are usually regarded as the more practical affairs of life. He lost what little ambition he ever had for money-making, and permitted good business opportunities to pass unheeded. He ceased to write the somewhat interesting but altogether respectable and commonplace stories and verses which he



had been in the habit of contributing to periodicals. He would take long trips into the country, no one knew where, and would spend more time in his favorite haunts about the city or on the ferries or the tops of omnibuses, at the theatre and opera, in picture galleries, and wherever he could observe men and women and art and nature. Dr. Bucke believed this change to be the result of a sudden — almost instantaneous — illumination, an experience of which he thought Whitman was conscious without fully understanding it, and that it is to this that he refers in the lines in the “Song of Myself” :—

“I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,

Swiftly arose and spread around me  
the peace and knowledge that pass  
all the argument of the earth,  
And I know that the hand of God is  
the promise of my own,  
And I know that the spirit of God is  
the brother of my own,

And that all the men ever born are  
also my brothers, and the women  
my sisters and lovers,  
And that a kelson of the creation is  
love.”

Whitman has said in *Specimen Days* that *Leaves of Grass* was forming itself in his mind for about eight years prior to its publication in 1855. The first edition was issued from the press of Rome Brothers, June, 1855. It is a thin quarto of ninety-five pages, eight by eleven and a quarter inches. It contains twelve “poems,” or rather the part of the book printed as verse is divided into twelve parts with no other headings than “Leaves of Grass.” It also contains a remarkable preface, printed as prose, but no less poetic than the rest, in which he outlined his purpose and from which the following is an extract:—

“The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth, have probably

the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem. In the history of the earth hitherto, the largest and most stirring appear tame and orderly to their ampler largeness and stir. Here at last is something in the doings of man that corresponds with the broadcast doings of the day and night. . . . Here is action untied from strings, necessarily blind to particulars and details, magnificently moving in vast masses. Here is the hospitality which for ever indicates heroes. . . . Here the performance disdaining the trivial unapproach'd in the tremendous audacity of its crowds and groupings and the push of its perspective spreads with crampless and flowing breadth and showers its prolific and splendid extravagance. One sees it must indeed own the riches of summer and winter, and need never be bankrupt while corn grows from the ground or the orchards drop apples or the bays

contain fish or men beget children upon women.

“Other states indicate themselves in their deputies — but the genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors — but always most in the common people. . . . The largeness of nature or the nation were monstrous without a corresponding largeness and generosity of the spirit of the citizen. Not nature nor swarming states nor streets and steamships nor prosperous business nor farms nor capital nor learning may suffice for the ideal of man — nor suffice the poet. No reminiscences may suffice either. A live nation can always cut a deep mark and can have the best authority the cheapest — namely from its own soul. This is the sum of the profitable uses of individuals or states and of present action

and grandeur and of the subjects of poets.—As if it were necessary to trot back generation after generation to the eastern records! As if the beauty and sacredness of the demonstrable must fall behind that of the mythical! As if men do not make their mark out of any times! As if the opening of the western continent by discovery and what has transpired in North and South America were less than the small theatre of the antique or the aimless sleepwalking of the middle ages! The pride of the United States leaves the wealth and finesse of the cities and all returns of commerce and agriculture and all the magnitude of geography or shows of exterior victory to enjoy the breed of full-sized men, or one full-sized man unconquerable and simple.

“The American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races . . . For such the expression of the American poet is to be transcendent and

new. It is to be indirect and not direct or descriptive or epic. Its quality goes through these to much more. Let the age and the wars of other nations be chanted and their eras and characters be illustrated and that finish the verse. Not so the great psalm of the republic. Here the theme is creative and has vista. . . . Whatever stagnates in the flat of custom or obedience or legislation he [the great poet] never stagnates. Obedience does not master him, he masters it. High up out of reach he stands turning a concentrated light — he turns the pivot with his finger — he baffles the swiftest runners as he stands and easily overtakes and envelopes them. The time straying toward infidelity and confessions and persiflage he withholds by his steady faith. . . . Faith is the anti-septic of the soul — it pervades the common people and preserves them — they never give up believing and expecting and trusting. There is that indescrib-

able freshness and unconsciousness about an illiterate person that humbles and mocks the power of the noblest expressive genius. The poet sees for a certainty how one not a great artist may be just as sacred and perfect as the greatest artist.”

In subsequent editions this preface is omitted, but the greater part of it is reprinted as verse and distributed among the new “poems” added; and in 1882 Whitman included it in a revised form in his first collected prose volume, *Specimen Days and Collect*. No author’s name appeared on the title-page of this first edition, nor did the name of any publisher. It read simply “Leaves of Grass. Brooklyn, New York: 1855.” Opposite the title-page, however, appeared the now well-known portrait of Whitman clad in shirt and trousers with a slouch hat, his left hand in the trousers pocket and his right resting on his hip. This portrait seemed really to appear to some

of the British critics "tougher" than the book itself. Of course, it was not "tough" at all, but represented a man with a face of great refinement, in negligee costume, standing in an easy, nonchalant attitude. Nevertheless, it did suggest something of a pose; and perhaps at that period of his career Whitman did pose to some extent. A thousand copies of the book were printed. A few were sent to newspapers for review, a few sent as presentation copies, and the rest placed with book-sellers for sale. The newspapers, as a rule, ignored the book. A few abused it with a violence of language which now seems ludicrous. Whitman himself wrote three anonymous reviews of it, in one of which he declared that "very devilish to some and very divine to others will appear these new poems." This review, which was reprinted in the second edition and also in Dr. Bucke's *Walt Whitman*, should be read in its entirety



as showing the poet's own idea of his work in setting out. All three appear in *In Re Walt Whitman*. Emerson was one of those to whom Whitman sent copies. Although his letter of acknowledgment is well known, it is too important to be omitted here :—

“Concord, Masstts, 21 July, 1855.

“*Dear Sir,*—I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of ‘Leaves of Grass.’ I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seems the sterile and stingy Nature, as if too much handiwork or too much lymph in the temperament were making our western wits fat and mean. I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well,

as they must be. I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire.

“I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging.

“I did not know until I, last night, saw the book advertised in a newspaper, that I could trust the name as real and available for a post-office. I wish to see my benefactor, and have felt much like striking my tasks and visiting New York to pay you my respects.

“R. W. EMERSON.

“MR. WALTER WHITMAN.”

It is not to be wondered at that the young poet should have been elated at the receipt of such a letter from such a

man, and, if his treatment of the matter was not the very wisest imaginable, it is easy, after the half-century that has elapsed, to pass it by with a smile; but at that time he was accused of betraying a confidence in publishing the letter. Removed from the heat of controversy, this appears like rank nonsense. A letter to an entire stranger in regard to a matter of public interest is not usually regarded as a private letter. If Emerson did not mean what he said, it is hard to see why he said it; and, if he did mean it, it is equally hard to see why he or any one else should object to its being made public. Before Whitman allowed the letter to be printed, he showed it to Charles A. Dana, who was a friend of Emerson as well as of Whitman; and he not only advised, but urged the latter to publish it. It really would have required a good deal of self-denial not to have done so; and it is not easy to see why the self-denial was called for, or,

waiving the question of good taste on Whitman's part, how Emerson was injured. After much hesitation he did publish it along with some press notices in an appendix to the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which appeared the following year; and not only that, but he had stamped on the back of the book in gilt letters the words: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career. R. W. Emerson." It was represented by Whitman's opponents that Emerson was greatly incensed at this, but there is no evidence that he was; and, in fact, there is the best of evidence that he was not, in that he fulfilled his implied promise to visit Whitman in New York, that he visited him repeatedly, and that friendly relations were established between the two men, manifested by their correspondence and their occasional meetings, which continued without interruption until the time of Emerson's death. There was nothing in the facts

to warrant the foot-note reference to the incident in Dr. Edward Emerson's *Emerson in Concord*. Dr. Emerson was either misled or expressed merely his own idea. Horace Traubel has letters in his possession of a much later date (including one from Emerson himself written in 1863) showing that Emerson had not substantially changed his opinion. In spite of all this, however, and of continued manifestations of friendliness, he did say on more than one occasion, years after, that Whitman had not treated him well in the matter of letters. He never disowned or withdrew what he had said, but he made it clear that he felt that somehow he had been abused. The subject involves a matter of casuistry which may be left to the judgment and taste of the reader. It is generally understood that Emerson's family and his immediate friends were bitterly opposed to Whitman or to any recognition of him, and this may

have prevented Emerson from following up the matter more warmly; but, be that as it may, he never retracted anything he said in the letter. In 1856, after the publication of the second edition, Emerson sent a copy of the book to Carlyle with a letter describing it as having "terrible eyes and buffalo strength."

Whitman replied to Emerson's letter in a long epistle which he published with the original letter in the appendix to the second edition. In it he addressed Emerson as "Master," and said rather more than was altogether tactful or necessary. It is quite believable that Emerson's fastidious taste suffered something of a shock at all this, but it is not at all believable that he took the matter very seriously or changed his mind in regard to the value of Whitman's work. Whitman himself in later years referred to the time when he hailed Emerson as "Master," and, while

making it quite clear that at the later period he would not have expressed himself in the same way, he yet declared that he was not sorry for the burst of enthusiasm that led to it. It was one of those acts which under the influence of enthusiasm every one sometimes does, and feels sheepish about afterward. It was rather naïve, and to be naïve is not considered quite dignified in this sophisticated age. The matter was really of very little consequence and hardly worth referring to, were it not that so much has been made of it.

The second edition, 1856, is a little, thick 16mo, containing nearly twice as much matter as the first edition. The title-page was still without author's or publisher's name, and the "rowdy" portrait was retained. Containing Emerson's letter in the appendix, it forced itself more upon the attention of the critics than did the first edition. They, however, for the most part, greeted it

with howls of derision and torrents of abuse. Emerson's letter puzzled them. They thought he must have been suffering from an attack of temporary insanity.

A month or so after the appearance of the first edition of the book *Moncure Conway* called on Whitman several times, went to the seashore and sauntered about the streets of New York with him. He afterward became a firm friend, although he somewhat annoyed Whitman by publishing in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1866 a rather bizarre account of their early interviews. It is not likely that he intended to misrepresent Whitman, but only — as he explained later — to make him picturesque to the English public.

Late in 1856 Thoreau came to see Whitman, presumably at Emerson's suggestion. He afterward wrote to his friend H. G. O. Blake in regard to his interview, and the letter is still extant, —



a very curious letter. Thoreau was evidently greatly puzzled. He writes: "I have just read his second edition (which he gave me) and it has done me more good than any reading for a long time. . . . On the whole, it sounds to me very brave and very American, after whatever deductions. I do not believe that all the sermons, so called, that have been preached in this land put together are equal to it for preaching. We ought to rejoice greatly in him. He occasionally suggests something a little more than human."

Nevertheless, the critics continued to bellow and howl with rage. Whitman would defy all canons of literary tradition and all rules of decency. Whitman seemed not in the least disturbed. He stooped down and wrote in the ground as though he heard them not. Among the additions in the second edition was "A Woman Waits for Me,"—a direct defiance.

About the time of the issuing of the first edition Whitman gave up his business of house-building. He is reported to have said that he was afraid of getting rich. After the book appeared, he went down to the eastern end of Long Island, where he spent the late summer and all the autumn, about Shelter Island and Peconic Bay, absorbing and writing out new material. Then, as he told Dr. Bucke, he went back to New York with the confirmed resolution, from which he never afterward wavered, to go on with his poetic enterprise in his own way, and finish it as well as he could.

Bryant and Whitman were on friendly terms at this time, and were in the habit of taking long walks together; but there does not seem to be any expression on Bryant's part in regard to Whitman's poetry. It is not likely that he cared for it.

About the only literary championship Whitman received during these years

immediately preceding the war was from the *Saturday Press*. This was a periodical whose purpose seemed to be to protest, apparently without any very distinct idea of what it was to protest against. Respectability and Boston were its principal objects of opposition. It was the organ of New York Bohemia, or what called itself and tried to be Bohemia; but Bohemianism was an exotic in New York at that time, and did not thrive in the alien soil. Nevertheless, it formed for a little while a meeting ground for a number of young writers, some of whom were destined to achieve fame. They were in the habit of resorting in the evening to Pfaff's, a German café or *Rathskellar* in Broadway near Bleeker Street. Whitman often formed one of the group, and appears to have been very popular with all who met him there. Henry Clapp, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, William Winter, Ned Wilkins, Charles F. Browne (Artemus

Ward), Fitz James O'Brien, Fitzhugh Ludlow, and Edmund Clarence Stedman were of the set. Ada Clare was the recognized queen of this little Bohemia. Howells in his *Literary Friends and Acquaintance* speaks of meeting Whitman at Pfaff's one evening in August, 1860. Howells was very much impressed by Whitman's hearty greeting. "I remember," he says, "how he leaned back in his chair and reached out his great hand to me as if he were going to give it to me for good and all." The impression that Whitman's personality made upon Howells seems to have been very strong. He says, "The spiritual purity which I felt in him no less than the dignity is something that I will no more try to reconcile with what denies it in his page, but such things we may well leave to the adjustment of finer balances than we have at hand. I will make sure only of the greatest benignity in the presence of the man. The apostle

of the rough, the uncouth, was the gentlest person; his barbaric yawp, translated into the terms of social encounter, was an address of singular quiet, delivered in a voice of winning and endearing friendliness." This utterance of Howells may be taken as an indication of Whitman's character to which all who came in contact with him in his early manhood and middle age bear testimony.

Vigorous, never especially witty or vivacious, but always entering into the humor of the occasion, rather slow of speech and seeming to weigh his words, devotedly attached to his friends, frank, spontaneous, hearty, sincere, with a high degree of manly reserve and yet genial and affectionate, calm in his demeanor, yet occasionally under extreme pressure giving vent to vehement indignation, he drew all with whom he came into personal contact to him in bonds of the highest esteem and warmest affection.

Cleanliness and purity seemed always to radiate from his person.

It was some time in 1861 that Whitman's association with Pfaff's terminated rather unpleasantly. In the course of a political discussion at the time of the breaking out of the war a young Southern sympathizer proposed the toast, "Success to Southern arms." Whitman made an indignant reply and walked out of the place; and, as he soon after left for the seat of war, he never went there again. But twenty years later, when Whitman was in New York, he found Pfaff in Twenty-fourth Street, and with his old host drank a toast to the memory of the old times and departed friends; and the first to be remembered was poor Ada Clare, who some time in the intervening years had died in the horrors of hydrophobia. This reminiscent visit he records in *Specimen Days*.

In 1857-58-59 *Leaves of Grass* was out of print. In 1860 a third edition

appeared, published by Thayer & Eldridge of Boston, a 12mo volume of 456 pages, very beautifully printed on fine heavy paper. The matter was about double that of the second edition, the additions including most of the "Calamus" poems, which were for the first time grouped under that heading, and the lines entitled "To a Common Prostitute." Not a word of the matter which had given offence in the former editions was omitted. While the book was passing through the press, Whitman being in Boston correcting the proofs, Emerson called on him, and said: "When people in Boston want to talk, they go to the Common. Let us go there." The talk is thus related by Whitman himself: "Up and down this breadth by Beacon Street, between these same old elms, I walk'd for two hours, of a bright sharp February mid-day twenty-one years ago, with Emerson, then in his prime, keen, physically and morally magnetic, arm'd

at every point, and when he chose, wielding the emotional just as well as the intellectual. During these two hours he was the talker, and I the listener. It was an argument-statement, reconnoitring, review, attack, and pressing home, (like an army corps in order, artillery, cavalry, infantry,) of all that could be said against that part (and a main part) in the construction of my poems, 'Children of Adam.' More precious than gold to me that dissertation. It afforded me, ever after, this strange and paradoxical lesson; each point of E.'s statement was unanswerable, no judge's charge ever more complete or convincing, I could never hear the points better put — and then I felt down in my soul the clear and unmistakable conviction to disobey all, and pursue my own way. 'What have you to say then to such things?' said E., pausing in conclusion. 'Only that while I can't answer them at all, I feel more settled than ever to adhere to



my own theory, and exemplify it,' was my candid response. Whereupon we went and had a good dinner at the American House."

Emerson's position seems an anomalous one in view of his own utterance: "Heroism feels and never reasons, and therefore is always right. . . . Heroism works in contradiction to the voice of mankind, and in contradiction, for a time, to the voice of the great and good. Heroism is an obedience to a secret impulse of an individual character." Emerson could never quite get away from his Puritan heredity, but it is not likely that Whitman fell in his esteem by reason of his firmness. There seems, however, to be some authority for the belief that Emerson's objections against the "Children of Adam" poems were not so much that he misunderstood or disapproved of their substance as because he foresaw the bitter attacks to which they would render the book

liable and felt that these would defer, or even defeat, the acceptance of its wholesome lessons of democracy.

There was less outcry about the book than there had been about the first and second editions. It started with a fair sale ; but the outbreak of the Civil War caused the failure of the publishers, and in the turmoil of war the book was forgotten.

Whitman's brother George had enlisted at the outbreak of the war and was wounded at the first battle of Fredericksburg, upon news of which Walt hastened to the front to his relief. Except for brief visits he never returned to New York.

## II. WAR-TIME AND WASHINGTON.

*Arous'd and angry, I'd thought to beat the  
alarum, and urge relentless war,  
But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face  
droop'd and I resign'd myself,  
To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or  
silently watch the dead.*

GEORGE WHITMAN, Walt's younger brother, was a brave and skilful officer. He went to the war as a lieutenant in the 51st New York Regiment, was in nearly all the great battles in Virginia, spent four or five months in Southern prisons, and was promoted by successive stages to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Walt gives a brief sketch of his career in *Specimen Days*. Captain Whitman's wound, which called Walt to the front, proved to be trifling, and in a short time he was able to rejoin his regiment; but Walt's interest in the sick and wounded soldiers was by this time so much enlisted that he determined to stay, and devote his full powers to the

relief of their sufferings. He remained in the neighborhood of Fredericksburg about a month, ministering to the wounded, and then accompanied a party of them to Washington, where he remained, as a "voluntary missionary," as he phrases it, devoting himself to the relief of the victims of battle and disease.

During those years in hospital, camp, and field he attended, according to his own estimate, from eighty to a hundred thousand sick and wounded, sustaining body and spirit in the time of need. His visits to them varied from an hour or two to all day or all night, for with critical cases he generally watched throughout the night. Sometimes he took up his quarters in the hospital, and slept there or watched with the sick and wounded soldiers several nights in succession. He declared these years to be the greatest privilege and satisfaction and to contain the most profound lesson

of his life. In his ministrations he comprehended all who came in his way, Northern or Southern, and slighted none. The experience aroused and brought out and decided in him undreamed of depths of emotion. He declared that it gave him the most fervent views of the true *ensemble* and extent of the States. He partook of all the fluctuations, gloom, despair, hopes again aroused, courage evoked, of that terrible period. Without this, he declared, *Leaves of Grass* would not be existing. It certainly would not in the form we have it to-day. It might have been great, but it would have been different, and it would not have had its fullest justification.

There seems to be no doubt that Whitman's mere personal presence was instrumental in saving thousands of lives. He brought the sick soldiers dainties, stationery, books, tobacco,—though, by the way, he never used tobacco himself,—

and whatever little comforts they required, so far as he could supply them; read to them and cheered them by the mere magnetism of his presence, bringing them hope, courage, and strength. Whatever the explanation, there can be no doubt of the fact. It is testified to by all the physicians and nurses who came in contact with him.

“I am he bringing help for the sick as they pant on their backs,” he had written before 1855; and in these days of gloom he justified the saying more literally than it is probable that he expected ever to find an opportunity of doing when the line was written.

His memorandum of the case of one New York soldier gives so touching a picture of the fulness of his sympathy and the comfort which his ministrations brought to the sick and dying that it may well be quoted here:—

“This afternoon, July 22d, I have spent a long time with Oscar F. Wilber,

Company G, 154th New York, low with chronic diarrhœa and a bad wound also. He asked me to read him a chapter in the New Testament. I complied, and ask'd him what I should read. He said, 'Make your own choice.' I open'd at the close of one of the first books of the evangelists, and read the chapters describing the latter hours of Christ, and the scenes at the crucifixion. The poor, wasted young man ask'd me to read the following chapter also, how Christ rose again. I read very slowly, for Oscar was feeble. It pleased him very much, yet the tears were in his eyes. He ask'd me if I enjoy'd religion. I said 'Perhaps not, my dear, in the way you mean, and yet, may-be, it is the same thing.' He said, 'It is my chief reliance.' He talked of death, and said he did not fear it. I said 'Why, Oscar, don't you think you will get well?' He said 'I may, but it is not probable.' He spoke calmly of his condition. The wound was

very bad, it discharg'd much. Then the diarrhœa had prostrated him, and I felt he was even then the same as dying. He behaved very manly and affectionate. The kiss I gave him as I was about leaving he return'd fourfold. He gave me his mother's address, Mrs. Sally D. Wilber, Alleghany post-office, Cattaraugus County, N. Y. I had several such interviews with him. He died a few days after the one just described."

Whitman's services had no connection with any of the organizations for the soldiers' relief. His work was entirely independent, voluntary, and gratuitous, the necessary funds being furnished by friends, mostly in Boston and New York. James Redpath interested Emerson and others, who gladly responded to the call. Whitman's personal expenses, which were very small,—he lived in what was hardly more than a garret,—he met by writing for the newspapers.

It was during this period that he be-



came intimate with William Douglas O'Connor, who became from that time so fast a friend and so doughty a champion. The friendship of John Burroughs also dates from this time, and both of these and many others have borne frequent and eloquent witness to Whitman's devotion and loyalty during these years of service as well as to the wonderful bracing and invigorating influence of his personality.

The immediate literary fruit of the war experiences was the collection of poems called *Drum Taps*. Under date of March 2, 1864, he writes to his mother: "If I can get a chance I think I shall come home for a while. I want to try to bring out a book of poems, a new one to be called 'Drum Taps,' and I want to come to New York for that purpose."

The book appeared early in 1865. The title-page bore no publisher's name. It read simply "Walt Whitman's Drum

Taps, New York, 1865.” After the book was printed and some copies had been sold, Whitman wrote “Memories of President Lincoln,” including the now famous burial-hymn, “When Lilacs Last in the Door Yard Bloomed” ; and this, with a few other poems, was printed as an insert of twenty-four pages, entitled *Sequel to Drum Taps*, which was bound up with the remaining copies as an appendix.

It does not appear that Lincoln and Whitman ever met in conversation, though they frequently passed in the street and exchanged greetings. Whitman’s admiration for Lincoln was unbounded ; and Lincoln’s exclamation when he saw Whitman pass the White House is well known : “ Well, he looks like a man ! ” For a while Whitman lived where he could see Lincoln daily as the latter passed to and from the Soldiers’ Home where he spent the nights during the warm weather. He usually rode, but

occasionally came and went in an open carriage, and was always escorted by a guard of cavalry with drawn sabres. Whitman could often see him plainly, and noted his dark brown face, with deep-cut lines, the eyes with a latent sadness in their expression. Once, as he passed quite near and bowed and smiled, Whitman noticed this expression very distinctly. He felt that no portrait of the President had caught the deep though subtle expression of his face, and thought that one of the great portrait painters of centuries ago was needed.

In 1864 Whitman obtained a clerkship in the Department of the Interior, which, however, he did not retain long. He was engaged at this time in revising *Leaves of Grass*, and kept in his desk a copy of the 1860 Thayer & Eldridge edition, in which from time to time he jotted down notes. One day after office hours James Harlan, the Secretary of

the Interior, had the volume abstracted from Whitman's desk and brought to his own room for his examination. Whitman was immediately discharged. Mr. Ashton, a friend of Whitman, called upon the secretary for an explanation. Mr. Harlan said that Whitman was dismissed because he was a "free lover and the author of an immoral book," and declared that he would not reinstate him if the President himself should demand it; he would resign in preference. This was the occasion of O'Connor's famous defence of Whitman, called *The Good Gray Poet*. It was an analysis of the sex problem in classic literature as far as the question of immorality is concerned. It is a most eloquent plea for liberty in literature, scathing in its denunciation, withering in the righteous lightning of its wrath. As an appeal for liberty in letters, it was applauded by literary men throughout the country, regardless of their views about

Whitman. To say that Harlan quailed would be an understatement. His attitude would have evoked pity from his bitterest enemy. Lacking the courage to defend his position by direct falsehood, he put the job off on an assistant, a creature named Lanman. This person fulfilled his commission by charging Whitman, in innuendo only, with drunkenness and incompetence. The latter charge gave the lie to Harlan, though it was probably not so intended. O'Connor replied by a challenge to Lanman to put his charges into the form of direct statements. Lanman made no response, and there the matter dropped.

What notice Whitman took of the tempest is not recorded. He certainly took none publicly. He was almost immediately given an equally good position in the office of the Attorney-General.

In Washington, Whitman's lifelong habit of intimate association with

“powerful uneducated persons” (which in the New York days had enabled him to find comrades among the omnibus drivers and ferry-boat pilots) led him into friendly relations with many of the drivers and conductors of the street-cars. His intimacy with one of these men was so typical an example of the comradeship which is celebrated in the section of *Leaves of Grass* entitled “Calamus” that it deserves special mention.

Peter Doyle was born in Ireland in 1847, and came to this country in infancy with his father, a blacksmith, who settled in Richmond, Va. Entering the Confederate army as a mere boy, he served throughout the war until he was paroled in Washington, where he obtained work as a street-car conductor. In this position, soon after the war, he met Whitman, who was a passenger on his car. In his own account of the meeting Doyle says: “We felt to each other at once. . . . He did not get out

at the end of the trip,—in fact, went all the way back with me. . . . From that time on we were the biggest sort of friends. . . . Walt rode with me often at noon, always at night. . . . It was our practice to go to a hotel on Washington Avenue after I was done with my car. Like as not I would go to sleep,—lay my head on my hands on the table. Walt would stay there, wait, watch, keep me undisturbed, would wake me up when the hour of closing came. . . . In the afternoon I would go up to the Treasury Building, and wait for him to get through if he was busy. Then we'd stroll out together, often without any plan, going wherever we happened to get. This occurred days in and out, months running."

This close companionship lasted until 1872, when Doyle entered the service of the Pennsylvania Railroad, by which he is still employed as a baggage-master. His friendship with Whitman continued

until the latter's death, and many and frequent letters passed between them. Whitman's letters were published in 1897, with an introduction by Dr. Bucke, containing an interesting interview with Peter Doyle. John Addington Symonds, who read the letters in manuscript, said of them: "They throw a flood of light upon 'Calamus,' and are superior to any commentary. [They] breathe a purity and simplicity of affection, a *naïveté* and reasonableness, which are very remarkable. . . . Throughout them Whitman shows the tenderest and wisest care for his young friend's welfare, helps him in material ways, and bestows upon him the best advice, the heartiest encouragement, without betraying any sign of patronage or preaching."

*Democratic Vistas* appeared as a pamphlet in 1871. It is a plea for a characteristic American democratic literature and a prophecy that such is to come.



Accepting the past with its monarchism and feudalism as that out of which our civilization has grown, it claims American democracy to be a training school for democracy in its highest form. It deprecates the restricted academic culture of the day, not absolutely, but as not realizing its pretensions, and pleads for the higher and wider culture based upon the principles of the "Divine average" and personalism. "For to democracy," he says, "the leveler, the unyielding principle of the average, is surely join'd another principle, equally unyielding, closely tracking the first, indispensable to it, opposite, (as the sexes are opposite,) and whose existence, confronting and ever-modifying the other, often clashing, paradoxical, yet neither of highest avail without the other, plainly supplies to these grand cosmic politics of ours, and to the launch'd-forth mortal dangers of republicanism, to-day or any day, the counterpart and offset

whereby Nature restrains the deadly original relentlessness of all her first-class laws. This second principle is individuality, the pride and centripetal isolation of a human being in himself—identity—personalism. Whatever the name, its acceptance and thorough infusion through the organizations of political commonalty now shooting Aurora-like about the world, are of utmost importance, as the principle itself is needed for very life's sake. It forms, in a sort, or is to form, the compensating balance-wheel of the successful working machinery of aggregate America.''

This book has been widely read, and has produced a profound influence upon working people as well as upon others both at home and abroad. As usual, Whitman proceeds by indirect and spiritual methods rather than by those direct and material. It is probably the most important of his prose works, though for fire and eloquence of diction

it does not reach the height of the preface of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

During the summer of 1864 Whitman's health began to give way. He experienced great lassitude and occasional attacks of faintness. Through an abrasion in his hand he became infected with septic poisoning from a gangrenous wound which he was assisting to dress. His arm to the shoulder became intensely inflamed. From this local affection he recovered with reasonable promptness, but his hitherto perfect health was ruined. He continued at his desk in Washington, pursuing his literary labors until 1873, when, on the night of the 22d of January, he had a paralytic stroke,—left-sided hemiplegia. From this he never fully recovered, entering thus upon a period of invalidism lasting nineteen years, until his death.

The simplicity of Whitman's tastes and habits is shown in a letter written to

his mother a few days after this attack and while still confined to bed:—

“Mrs. Ashton has sent for me to be brought to her house to be taken care of—of course I do not accept her offer—they live in grand style and I should be more bothered than benefitted by their refinements and luxuries, servants, etc.

“Mother, I want you to know truly, that I do not want for anything—as to all the *little extra fixings and superfluities*, I never did care for them in health and they only annoy me in sickness—I have a good bed—a fire—as much grub as I wish and whatever I wish—and two or three good friends here, so I want you to not feel at all uneasy—as I write Peter Doyle is sitting by the window reading—He and Charles Eldridge regularly come in and do whatever I want and are both *very helpful* to me—one comes daytime and one evening.”

On May 23 of the same year his mother died in Camden, New Jersey,

where she had gone to her son George's home. Walt was able to reach her before her death, but the event was a great shock, and he became worse. He thereupon abandoned Washington, and took up his residence in Camden.

Besides *Drum Taps* and its sequel, two editions of *Leaves of Grass* had appeared during the Washington period. The fourth edition, "Leaves of Grass, New York, 1867," included as supplements "Drum Taps" and "Sequel to Drum Taps," containing the Lincoln poems, and a new section, "Songs before Parting," comprising "By Blue Ontario's Shore," "Song at Sunset," "Assurances," "So Long," and some minor pieces. The fifth edition is "Leaves of Grass, Washington, D.C., 1871."

It was also during the Washington period of his life that he wrote the poem now known as "Song of the Exposition," read at the opening of the American Institute in New York, and

“Passage to India.” These were originally published as brochures, and then included in the later bound copies of the Washington edition, the date on the title-page being changed to 1872. In 1872 he wrote for the Dartmouth College commencement “As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free”; the poem which is now known as “Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood.”

From the first, Whitman seemed more popular in England than in America. About this time his adherents there showed themselves especially strong. In 1868 William Michael Rossetti published his volume of selections. This was with Whitman’s consent and co-operation, and the correspondence in regard to the book led to a warm friendship between the two. Rossetti called the attention of his friend Mrs. Anne Gilchrist—widow of Alexander Gilchrist, author of the *Life of William Blake*—to Whitman’s work. It won her most en-

thusiastic admiration immediately. "I had not dreamed," she wrote to Rossetti, "that words could cease to be words and become electric streams like these." Mrs. Gilchrist wrote to Whitman, and afterward, in 1876, she came to America. The friendship which ensued between her and Whitman terminated only with her death, in 1885. It is to her that he refers in the lines entitled "Going Somewhere," as his "noblest woman friend." Mrs. Gilchrist's letter to Rossetti was published in *The Radical*, Boston, May, 1870. It has frequently been reprinted both in England and in America, and can be found in Dr. Bucke's *Walt Whitman* and in *In Re Walt Whitman*. It was the beginning of the reaction in Whitman's favor, and there can be no doubt that he rejoiced greatly in it. He had written, "Whether I come to my own to-day or in ten thousand or ten million years, I can cheerfully take it now or with equal

cheerfulness I can wait." Still there is no reason to suppose that he was not pleased to "take it now." He had always felt and said that he looked to women to understand and accept his message first, and here was his expectation justified in the appreciation of this truly noble woman. Just how much direct influence this letter had it is impossible to say, but it is certain that at this time a distinct movement in Whitman's favor began to manifest itself abroad. Letters came from Tennyson, Symonds, Edward Dowden, Gabriel Sarrazin, Edward Carpenter, Roden Noel, Ernest Rhys, and many others. English, German, and French reviewers began to consider Whitman seriously. Rossetti had already written about him in England, and Freiligrath as early as 1868 had published an essay on *Leaves of Grass* in a German periodical; but it was after Mrs. Gilchrist's letter that the recognition from abroad began to take



definite form and to become general. From then till now intelligent, thinking, broad-minded women have been among the foremost and staunchest champions of Whitman's cause.

It has long been the practice of some would-be apologists of Whitman to cite his services to the soldiers in war-time as a sort of *raison d'être* for the man. His goodness of heart and self-sacrifice thus manifested, they argue, might be offset against his bad poetry and bad morals. It is needless to say that this was the view of neither Whitman nor his friends. To Whitman the significance of the war experience was that the splendid defence of the Republic by its sons and their sacrifices for an ideal fully justified his faith in American Democracy and his hopes for a greater Democracy. To his friends, Whitman's war experience meant the concrete realization of the spirit of *Leaves of Grass* in the personal life of its author. As he gave willing

service and self-sacrifice to his country, he was but one of many ; but, as the concrete practical expression of his written word, this period of stress and storm represented faith supported and justified by works. It is evident that, when Whitman said in 1888 that, if it were not for the war, *Leaves of Grass* would not be then existing, he meant that it would not, without the war, have had its full realization.

It now seems strange, and it is a curious example of how the public often forms its opinions of literary work from hack critics, that "Drum Taps" and "When Lilacs Last in the Door Yard Bloomed" should not have won instant applause. They were free from the alleged uncouthness and indecencies of the *ante-bellum* poems, and contained nothing to offend the most "malignant virtue," to use O'Connor's expressive phrase. For graphic intensity "Drum Taps" is unsurpassed in the literature

of things militant. Of the Lincoln threnody, Swinburne truly said it was "the most sonorous anthem ever chanted in the church of the world." Swinburne showed great enthusiasm for Whitman for a while. In his *Songs before Sunrise* he wrote a poem entitled "To Walt Whitman in America," beginning:—

"Send but a song over sea for us,  
Heart of their hearts who are free,  
Heart of their singers to be for us  
More than our singers can be."

Swinburne's change of attitude—it could hardly be a change of opinion—is well known, and at a later period he took occasion to revile Whitman publicly in terms that should make a "drunken apple woman reeling in the gutter" blush, to use Swinburne's own chaste diction. Whitman's comment, when he heard the latter pronouncement, must be recorded: "Isn't he the damnedest simulacrum?" but he showed

no feeling on the subject, and was absolutely undisturbed by the attack.

“Drum Taps,” unlike most war poems, is neither a celebration of individual heroes nor of operations of mighty armies, but rather of the individual, average American man under the stress and strain of the great struggle for national existence,—his heroism, his patience, his loyalty, and his suffering. These poems, while less emphatic in their revolt against the established canons of literary art than are the earlier *Leaves*, are still sufficiently unconventional in form, and are remarkable as exhibiting Whitman’s wonderful skill in word-painting. The themes are “Manhattan Arming,” the outbreak of the war and “the armed host advancing to meet it,” the battle scenes in Virginia, the “Bivouac on the Mountain-side,” the sights in the hospitals, and finally, when the war is over, “Reconciliation, word over all, beautiful as the sky.”

Considered as lyric poetry, the Lincoln threnody is undoubtedly Whitman's masterpiece.

Lincoln is dead : in the springtide of  
the year and in the springtide of victory,  
“When lilacs last in the dooryard  
bloomed,  
And the great star early droop'd in  
the western sky in the night,”

the poet mourns for the victorious but fallen hero. Three images are inextricably twined in the verse: the lilac with its heart-shaped leaves of rich green, with its delicate pointed blossoms and its pervading perfume; the powerful western fallen star sinking and disappearing in the black murk; and the song of the hermit thrush.

“In the swamp in secluded recesses,  
A shy and hidden bird is warbling a  
song.  
Solitary the thrush,  
The hermit withdrawn to himself,  
avoiding the settlements,  
Sings by himself a song.”

Through the land passes the funeral car, over the breast of the spring, amid cities, amid lanes, and through old woods where lately the violets peeped from the ground,—passing the endless grass, passing the yellow-speared wheat every grain from its shroud in the dark brown fields uprisen, passing the apple-tree blows of pink and white in the orchard. Through day and night with the great cloud darkening the land ; with the pomp of inlooped flags and the cities draped in black ; with the show of the States themselves, as of crape-veiled women standing ; with the countless torches lighted, the solemn faces and the unbared heads ; the dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs. To the coffin slowly passing through these scenes, bearing the hero to where he shall rest in the grave, the poet brings his sprig of lilac plucked from the bush in the dooryard.

He turns to the western orb sailing the

heavens. He knows now what it must have meant the month before when he walked in the transparent shadowy night, and he saw the star had something to tell him, as it bent down night after night, drooping low down to him, and wandering by his side in the solemn night, and again as he stood on the rising ground in the breeze, and then the star was lost in the netherward black of the night.

The hermit thrush is still singing. "Limitless out of the dusk, out of the cedars and pines," he sings that most exquisite of threnodies :—

"Come lovely and soothing death,  
Undulate round the world, serenely  
arriving, arriving,  
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,  
Sooner or later delicate death."

And, as the bird sings, the sight that was bound in the poet's eyes uncloses, and he sees, as in noiseless dreams, hun-

dreds of battle flags, borne through the smoke of the battles and pierced with missiles, carried hither and yon through the smoke, torn and bloody, and at last but a few shreds left on the staffs, and the staffs all splintered and broken. He sees the corpses of the young men, all the slain soldiers of the war. But he sees that they are not as was thought: they are fully at rest; they suffer not. The living remain and suffer.

Loosing the hold of his comrades' hands, he passes the visions of the night, passes the song of the hermit bird, that victorious and powerful psalm in the night which had been low and wailing and then again bursting with joy, covering the earth and filling the spread of the heaven; the poet ceases his song for his lustrous comrade of the West.

“Yet each to keep and all, retrievemens  
out of the night,  
The song, the wondrous chant of the  
gray-brown bird,



And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd  
in my soul,  
With the lustrous and drooping star  
with the countenance full of woe,  
With the holders holding my hand  
nearing the call of the bird,  
Comrades mine, and I in the midst,  
and their memory ever to keep,  
for the dead I loved so well,  
For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my  
days and lands — and this for his  
dear sake,  
Lilac and star and bird twined with  
the chant of my soul,  
There in the fragrant pines and the  
cedars dusk and dim."

John Burroughs knew Whitman intimately. From the autumn of 1863 to the time of Whitman's departure from Washington he saw him a great deal of the time, and visited him yearly in Camden during the rest of his life. This is his description of him :—

"In person Whitman was large and tall, above six feet, with a breezy open-

air look. His temperament was sanguine; his voice was a tender baritone. The dominant impression he made was that of something fresh and clean. I remember the first time I met him, which was in Washington, in the fall of 1863. I was impressed by the fine grain and clean, fresh quality of the man. Some passages in his poems had led me to expect something different. He always had the look of a man who had just taken a bath. The skin was light and clear, and the blood well to the surface. His body, as I once noticed when we were bathing in the surf, had a peculiar fresh bloom and fineness and delicacy of texture. His physiology was undoubtedly remarkable, unique. The full beauty of his face and head did not appear till he was past sixty. After that, I have little doubt, it was the finest head this age or country has seen. Every artist who saw him was instantly filled with a keen desire to sketch him.

The lines were so simple, so free, and so strong. High, arching brows; straight, clear-cut nose; heavy-lidded, blue-gray eyes; forehead not thrust out and emphasised, but a vital part of a symmetrical, dome-shaped head; ear large, and the most delicately carved I have ever seen; the mouth and chin hidden by a soft, long, white beard. It seems to me his face steadily refined and strengthened with age. Time depleted him in just the right way,—softened his beard and took away the too florid look; subdued the carnal man, and brought out more fully the spiritual man. When I last saw him (December 26, 1891), though he had been very near death for many days, I am sure I had never seen his face so beautiful. There was no breaking-down of the features, or the least sign of decrepitude, such as we usually note in an old man. The expression was full of pathos, but it was as grand as that of a god. I could not

think of him as near death, he looked so unconquered.

“British critics have spoken of Whitman’s athleticism, his athletic temperament, etc., but he was in no sense a muscular man, an athlete. His body, though superb, was curiously the body of a child ; one saw this in its form, in its pink color, and in the delicate texture of the skin. He took little interest in feats of strength, or in athletic sports. He walked with a slow, rolling gait, indeed, moved slowly in all ways ; he always had an air of infinite leisure. For several years, while a clerk in the Attorney-General’s Office in Washington, his exercise for an hour each day consisted in tossing a few feet into the air, as he walked, a round, smooth stone, of about one pound weight, and catching it as it fell. Later in life, and after his first paralytic stroke, when in the woods, he liked to bend down the young saplings, and exercise his arms and chest in that way.”

### III. CAMDEN AND INVALIDISM.

*Welcome, ineffable grace of dying days!*

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*And I myself for long, O Death, have  
breath'd my every breath  
Amid the nearness and the silent thought of  
thee.*

FOR nineteen years Whitman walked in the valley of the shadow of death. For two years following his removal to Camden he was physically prostrated, and during the whole of this period he was a half-paralyzed invalid. I cannot do better than to quote from Dr. Bucke's *Walt Whitman*: "And now for several years, his life hung upon a thread. Though he suffered at times severely, he never became dejected or impatient. It was said by one of his friends that in that combination of illness, poverty, and old age, Walt Whitman has been more grand than in the full vigor of manhood. A little while after he became incapacitated by illness, he was discharged from

his government clerkship and everything like an income entirely ceased. So that I know that during those years Walt Whitman had to bear the imminent prospect of death, great pain and suffering at times, poverty, his poetic enterprise a failure, and the face of the public either clouded in contempt or turned away in indifference.”

During the earlier part of his residence in Camden he was an inmate of the household of his brother George in Stevens Street. While he was on the friendliest terms with Colonel Whitman and his wife, he seemed to long for greater freedom than he could enjoy while he was obliged, to some extent at least, to conform to the domestic arrangements of any one's family ; and, after the attempted suppression of his book in Boston had stimulated its sale to an unwonted degree, he took the royalty proceeds and with some assistance from friends bought the “shack,” as he

called it, in Mickle Street so well known as the home of his latter days. It was rather a miserable little two-story frame house in a neighborhood not especially agreeable, but with his simple tastes it answered his purpose very well.

The first considerable literary undertaking after his removal to Camden was the issuing of the Centennial or author's edition in 1876. This consisted of two volumes, *Leaves of Grass* and *Two Rivulets*. The former was practically a reprint of the edition of 1871 with a few poems intercalated. The *Two Rivulets* was a collection of prose and verse, and included "Democratic Vistas," "Centennial Songs," and "Passage to India," all of which had previously appeared in pamphlet form, together with seventeen new poems, among them "Eidolons," "The Prayer of Columbus," "To a Locomotive in Winter," "Song of the Redwood Tree," and "Song of the Universal."

This Centennial edition was warmly taken up by a party of English friends, headed by William Michael Rossetti. Robert Buchanan had published something to the effect that Whitman was altogether neglected and starving. Although Whitman was poor, this was decidedly an overstatement and caused him some annoyance. He never asked his English or other friends for pecuniary assistance, but he did ask them to buy his book. Rossetti's appeal was well responded to, and a good many copies of this edition went abroad. Whitman was highly appreciative of this assistance from his English friends, and, in fact, it did carry him over a very serious crisis. He writes, "Those blessed gales from the British Isles probably — certainly — saved me."

After the first two years of Whitman's residence in Camden he had recovered his health sufficiently to make short trips into the country; and he



spent a considerable part of his time at the farm-house of his friends the Staffords, on Timber Creek, twelve or thirteen miles from where it flows into the Delaware. He describes it as a "charming recluse and rural spot," and it seems to have afforded him great enjoyment. He lived half the time along the creek and its adjacent fields and lanes; and probably to his out-of-door life there he owed his partial recovery from the prostration of 1874-75,— "a sort of second wind or semi-renewal of the lease of life," he calls it. His account of these bucolic scenes is, perhaps, the most charming part of his *Specimen Days* diary: "Dear, soothing, healthy, restoration hours — after three confining years of paralysis — after the long strain of the war and its wounds and death."

It had long been Whitman's wish on every anniversary of Lincoln's assassination "to gather a few friends and hold its tragic reminiscence." He was not

able to do this very often, but in furtherance of the idea he prepared the lecture which he delivered for the first time in New York, April 14, 1879. It was the occasion of a very brilliant ovation to Whitman,—the first he ever received,—and the theatre was thronged with the men and women best known in American letters.

By September, 1879, Whitman found himself strong enough to undertake a long jaunt West, lasting three or four months. He visited Colorado, and penetrated the Rocky Mountain region far enough to get a good notion of it. In “this plenitude of material, entire absence of art, untrammell’d play of primitive Nature—the chasm, the gorge, the crystal mountain stream, repeated scores, hundreds of miles—the broad handling and absolute uncrampedness—the fantastic forms, bathed in transparent browns, faint reds and grays, towering sometimes a thousand, sometimes two or

three thousand feet high — at their tops now and then huge masses pois'd, and mixing with the clouds, with only their outlines, hazed in misty lilac, visible" — in such scenes he found the law of his own poems. On his return journey he spent nearly three months with his brother "Jeff" in St. Louis, and reached Camden early in January, 1880. In June of that year he made a visit to Dr. Bucke at London, Ontario, and with Dr. Bucke took a trip through the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence.

In August, 1881, he was putting the last touches to the new edition of *Leaves of Grass*,—"the completed book at last," he calls it; and so it is, for, except that three "annexes," "Sands at Seventy," "Good-Bye my Fancy," and "Old Age Echoes," comprising later poems, have been added, it is the book as we have it to-day.

Early in May of that year Whitman had received a letter from his friend

John Boyle O'Reilly, saying that James R. Osgood & Co. wished to see the copy for the new edition of *Leaves of Grass* that Whitman contemplated bringing out. Whitman upon the strength of this wrote to Osgood outlining the plan on which he wanted the book produced, and warning him that "the sexuality odes, about which the original row was started and kept up so long, are all retained and must go in the same as ever." Osgood thereupon wrote for the copy, which was sent May 27 and immediately accepted. After some further correspondence in reference to royalties, portraits to be included, and other details, the formal contract was signed on October 1, Whitman having gone to Boston to supervise the publication. He seems to have enjoyed the trip to Boston greatly, and he devotes several pages of *Specimen Days* to describing his visits to Longfellow, Sanborn, Emerson, Alcott, and others. It was the first time he

ever visited Emerson at the latter's home, and it was a memorable occurrence to him. When the book was ready for issue, Whitman returned to Camden, conscious that at last he had secured a publisher of national reputation. Upwards of two thousand copies had been sold, and the sales were steadily continuing, when on March 1, 1882, the publishers received a notice from Oliver Stevens, the District Attorney at Boston, that *Leaves of Grass* was officially classified as obscene literature, and stating that, unless the book was withdrawn from publication and the edition suppressed, the publishers would be proceeded against. The publishers enclosed the letter to Whitman, saying they were not informed what portions of the book were objected to, and asking whether he would consent to withdraw the obnoxious features. Whitman replied—and it is the only instance where he made any such con-

cession — that he would be willing to cancel a few lines, which he thought might be the offending ones, apparently having no conception of the wholesale expurgation necessary to satisfy the official sense of decorum.

Under date of March 21, Osgood & Co. wrote to Whitman, enclosing a list of the passages of which the District Attorney demanded it should be expunged. They included the whole of "A Woman Waits for Me," "To a Common Prostitute," and "The Dalliance of the Eagles," besides nearly two hundred other lines scattered throughout the book. Whitman replied that the list "whole and several" was rejected by him, and would not be thought of under any circumstances. Osgood & Co. then wrote that they thought the official mind would be satisfied by the omission of "A Woman Waits for Me" and "To a Common Prostitute." Whitman replied, "No, I cannot consent to leave out the

two pieces." Osgood then declined further to circulate the book, and an arrangement was made by which the plates and remaining copies of the edition were turned over to the author. Whitman did not seem to be at all disturbed; but, naturally, his friends were very angry. O'Connor sent one of his trumpet-blasts to the *New York Tribune*, which, strange to say, printed it; and even conservative literary men, who had no especial sympathy with Whitman, denounced the proceeding, George William Curtis, for instance, writing that it was an outrage on the freedom of letters, and that every author who realized this should take part in the defence, regardless of his opinion of Whitman.

The plates were taken by Rees, Welsh & Co., of Philadelphia, who were succeeded by David McKay. The advertising accorded the book had its natural result. The sale was greatly augmented, and in a short time Whitman received

sufficient money from royalties to carry out the purchase of the house in Mickle Street. This was the last official attack on *Leaves of Grass*, which has had a moderate and steady sale ever since.

It transpired later that neither Stevens, the District Attorney, nor the Massachusetts Attorney-General had any knowledge of the book beyond the passages that had been pointed out to them by somebody connected with the New England Society for the Suppression of Vice, and Stevens seemed to be somewhat ashamed of himself when he learned the true nature of his action and the storm it had raised. Of course, it was no excuse for their official act that the Attorney-General and District Attorney did not know what they were doing ; but at least they can be acquitted of the charge of malevolence, and condemned only for their official stupidity. Of course, from the Vice Society nothing else was to be expected. Osgood & Co. suffered



very severe criticism. It may be they were not morally required to undergo martyrdom in a cause which they perhaps regarded as none of theirs; but at the present time it certainly seems that not only would it have been braver to have stood by their client, but also the better policy. It is said that they afterwards expressed regret that they had weakly yielded, and the District Attorney that he had not sufficiently acquainted himself with the nature of the book before taking action. Whitman was entirely unruffled, and never expressed animosity against any one concerned. He had been engaged in making a collection of his prose writings, under the title of *Specimen Days and Collect*; and this was brought out by Rees, Welsh & Co. as a companion volume to *Leaves of Grass*. These two volumes, with subsequent additions to each, comprise Whitman's works as they appear to-day.

The remaining ten years of Whitman's life were outwardly uneventful, and were spent amid what should accompany old age, — love, honor, troops of friends.

When he was strong enough and the weather was pleasant, he would sit in his chair in front of his house, and passing acquaintances or strangers would stop and speak to him, or the children make him their playfellow. A number of his friends made him a present of a horse and phaeton, which for a few years afforded him great comfort ; but in 1888 they were sold under the conviction that they would never again be needed. Subsequently his excursions were made in his wheel-chair, by means of which he was enabled to go down to the Delaware and observe the sights and sounds of the river.

His reading was extensive both in classic and in current literature, including periodicals and newspapers ; thus he kept well informed regarding the events

of the day. Among contemporary writers, Carlyle, Emerson, and Ingersoll were his particular favorites. He did not care especially for Ruskin. He let political and religious controversies alone, as a rule, and ignored theological periodicals and books. Especially interesting discussions, however, sometimes keenly attracted his attention, such as those of Ingersoll and Huxley. He greatly liked Tolstoy's fiction, but was offended by the introspection and pessimism of his later works. Ibsen did not attract him. He disclaimed sufficient familiarity with Browning to judge of him, but recognized the strength of parts of his work. Burroughs thought Whitman the best critic in America.

While, of course, he was one of the greatest of reformers, he would not read reform books nor associate himself with any special reform system. His ideas of reform were spiritual,—included all, anarchist, socialist, democrat, aristocrat,

but none could specialize or appropriate him.

To Sidney Morse, in 1887, he said that the labor problem, as a practical question, belonged to younger heads than his, if there really was anything to be said or done about it. He was not sure but things were working well enough as they were, evolving in their natural course far better results than any theory of socialism could promise. Evils were being sloughed off about as fast as they could be, he thought. But he could not go into it. There was more talk anyway on the subject than was warranted by the situation or good for the workingmen themselves. So far as he could see, there was as much "cussed selfishness" on the one side as the other. It was a question of manhood, if anything. Workingmen's strikes were apt to develop little of that. They would set on their fellow-workingmen who did not belong to their "union" like tigers or

other beasts of prey. It was their "union" against the world. The spectacle was not pleasing. "Let the worker, whoever he be, accept the situation, and triumph on the side of manliness in spite of it. Then he would bring to his side the world's sympathy. Let him ride down his temptations to be mean and niggardly, even in dire extremity, as a hero would, and his cause is won. Let him say to the 'scab,' 'Thy necessities are as great or greater than mine,' rivalling Sir Philip Sidney. 'How can a man be hid?' old Confucius asked. How can he? or despoiled? No capitalist can rob any man of his manhood. When the labor agitation is other than a kicking of somebody else out to let myself in, I shall warm up to it, maybe." At other times he betrayed an anxiety in behalf of the "masses driven to the wall," and felt that somehow the Republic was not safe while "anybody was being so driven."

It is by no means to be understood by this that Whitman was not fully alive to the evils of the social and economic situation or the dangers lurking in it. This he made clear many times both in writing and in conversation, as, for instance, in the following terrible indictment of society in *Democratic Vistas*:—

“I say we had best look our times and lands searchingly in the face, like a physician diagnosing some deep disease. Never was there, perhaps, more hollow-ness at heart than at present, and here in the United States. Genuine belief seems to have left us. The underlying principles of the States are not honestly believ'd in. . . . What penetrating eye does not everywhere see through the mask? The spectacle is appalling. We live in an atmosphere of hypocrisy throughout. The men believe not in the women, nor the women in the men. A scornful superciliousness rules in literature. The aim of all the *littérateurs* is

to find something to make fun of. A lot of churches, sects, &c., the most dismal phantasms I know, usurp the name of religion. Conversation is a mass of badinage. From deceit in the spirit, the mother of all false deeds, the offspring is already incalculable. An acute and candid person, in the revenue department in Washington, who is led by the course of his employment to regularly visit the cities, north, south and west, to investigate frauds, has talk'd much with me about his discoveries. The depravity of the business classes of our country is not less than has been supposed, but infinitely greater. The official services of America, national, state, and municipal, in all their branches and departments, except the judiciary, are saturated in corruption, bribery, falsehood, mal-administration; and the judiciary is tainted. The great cities reek with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrel-

ism. In fashionable life, flippancy, tepid amours, weak infidelism, small aims, or no aims at all, only to kill time. In business, (this all-devouring modern word, business,) the one sole object is, by any means, pecuniary gain. The magician's serpent in the fable ate up all the other serpents; and money-making is our magician's serpent, remaining to-day sole master of the field. The best class we show, is but a mob of fashionably dress'd speculators and vulgarians. True, indeed, behind this fantastic farce, enacted on the visible stage of society, solid things and stupendous labors are to be discover'd, existing crudely and going on in the background, to advance and tell themselves in time. Yet the truths are none the less terrible. I say that our New World democracy, however great a success in uplifting the masses out of their sloughs, in materialistic development, products, and in a certain highly-deceptive superficial



popular intellectuality, is, so far, an almost complete failure in its social aspects, and in really grand religious, moral, literary, and esthetic results. In vain do we march with unprecedented strides to empire so colossal, outvying the antique, beyond Alexander's, beyond the proudest sway of Rome. In vain have we annex'd Texas, California, Alaska, and reach north for Canada and south for Cuba. It is as if we were somehow being endow'd with a vast and more and more thoroughly-appointed body, and then left with little or no soul."

While he was, in a sense, in sympathy with the spirit of the various overt attempts to remove the evil, he was not convinced of the efficiency or absolute justice of any of the organized schemes for social redemption. It was not that he advocated *laissez-faire* nor believed that the evils would right themselves, but he felt that the true remedies are

spiritual and must proceed from within outward, not mechanical for external application. Faith, individualism, solidarity, he believed to be the true anti-septics. "Produce great persons, the rest follows"; and to Dr. Bucke he said, "I have imagined a life which should be that of the average man, in average circumstances, but still grand, heroic."

One of the best pen sketches of Whitman in his old age is given by Dr. John Johnston, of Bolton, England, and is quoted by John Burroughs in his *Whitman, a Study*. The present writer saw Whitman a few years earlier, in his room in Mickle Street, and, except for the difference those few years made, his recollection corresponds exactly with Dr. Johnston's description.

"The first thing about himself that struck me," says Dr. Johnston, "was the physical immensity and magnificent proportions of the man, and, next, the

picturesque majesty of his presence as a whole.

“He sat quite erect in a great cane-runged chair, cross-legged, and clad in rough gray clothes, with slippers on his feet, and a shirt of pure white linen, with a great wide collar edged with lace, the shirt buttoned about midway down his breast, the big lapels of the collar thrown open, the points touching his shoulders, and exposing the upper portion of his hirsute chest. He wore a vest of gray homespun, but it was unbuttoned almost to the bottom. He had no coat on and his shirt sleeves were turned up above the elbows, exposing most beautifully shaped arms, and flesh of the most delicate whiteness. Although it was so hot, he did not perspire visibly, while I had to keep mopping my face. His hands are large and massive, but in perfect proportion to the arms; the fingers long, strong, white, and tapering to a blunt end. His nails

are square, showing about an eighth of an inch separate from the flesh, and I noticed that there was not a particle of impurity beneath any of them. But his majesty is concentrated in his head, which is set with leonine grace and dignity upon his broad, square shoulders; and it is almost entirely covered with long, fine, straggling hair, silvery and glistening, pure and white as sunlit snow, rather thin on the top of his high, rounded crown, streaming over and around his large but delicately-shaped ears, down the back of his big neck; and, from his pinky-white cheeks and top lip, over the lower part of his face, right down to the middle of his chest, like a cataract of materialized, white, glistening vapor, giving him a most venerable and patriarchal appearance. His high, massive forehead is seamed with wrinkles. His nose is large, strong, broad, and prominent, but beautifully chiselled and proportioned, almost

straight, very slightly depressed at the tip, and with deep furrows on each side, running down to the angles of the mouth. The eyebrows are thick and shaggy, with strong, white hair, very highly arched and standing a long way above the eyes, which are of a light blue with a tinge of gray, small, rather deeply set, calm, clear, penetrating, and revealing unfathomable depths of tenderness, kindness, and sympathy. The upper eyelids droop considerably over the eyeballs. The lips, which are partly hidden by the thick, white moustache, are full. The whole face impresses one with a sense of resoluteness, strength, and intellectual power, and yet withal a winning sweetness, unconquerable radiance, and hopeful joyousness. His voice is highly pitched and musical, with a timbre which is astonishing in an old man. There is none of the tremor, quaver, or shrillness usually observed in them, but his utterance is clear, ring-

ing, and most sweetly musical. But it was not in any one of these features that his charm lay so much as in his *tout ensemble*, and the irresistible magnetism of his sweet, aromatic presence, which seemed to exhale sanity, purity, and naturalness, and exercised over me an attraction which positively astonished me, producing an exaltation of mind and soul which no man's presence ever did before. I felt that I was here face to face with the living embodiment of all that was good, noble, and lovable in humanity."

During the period from 1884 until his death in 1892, Whitman was greatly aided and sustained by some of his immediate friends and neighbors, especially Thomas B. Harned and Horace Traubel, who, with Dr. Bucke, became his literary executors. Traubel, indeed, devoted his time and service almost entirely to him. Without his aid Whitman would not have been able to bring

out his last two books, *November Boughs* and *Good-Bye my Fancy*. Beginning in 1887, a consecutive and detailed diary record was kept by Traubel of all of Whitman's almost daily conversations with him. This has just now (1904) been announced for publication under the title of *With Walt Whitman in Camden*.

On the night of Washington's birthday, 1887, the Contemporary Club gave Whitman a reception in Philadelphia. Although he was very feeble at the time, the affair was most successful. He read from his own and other poems, and entered fully into the spirit of the occasion.

On June 2, 1888, as he was engaged in preparing *November Boughs* for the press, he suffered another paralytic stroke. For a few days his life was almost despaired of, and from that time on he was much more feeble. After some necessary delay he produced *November*

*Boughs*, following it with a large single-volume edition of his complete works, limited to 600 autographed copies, which was handled by himself as a personal edition.

In 1889 the poet's seventieth birthday was celebrated by a public meeting and a complimentary dinner given to him by the citizens of Camden. A large company assembled in Morgan's Hall, and prominent citizens of both Camden and Philadelphia paid tribute to the poet and voiced the affectionate regard of his neighbors. Among the speakers who came from a distance were Herbert H. Gilchrist, Richard Watson Gilder, Julian Hawthorne, and Hamlin Garland; while telegrams and letters of congratulation were received from many of Whitman's most prominent contemporaries on both sides of the ocean, among these being messages from William Morris, John Hay, Howells, Whittier, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, and Mark Twain. Whitman



also celebrated this birthday by publishing a beautiful pocket edition of *Leaves of Grass* with a special commemorative note upon its title-page. Of this edition only 300 copies were issued, all of which were signed by the author.

On April 15, 1890, the Contemporary Club gave him a second reception. He was very ill with an attack of the grippe, and it was uncertain until almost the last moment whether he could attend; but his indomitable will carried him through, and he read his Lincoln address with his usual strong, melodious voice.

Whitman's intimate relations with his friends, and his devotion to them and theirs to him, continued to the last. For several years before Whitman's death it had been customary with a few of his friends to celebrate his birthday with a dinner. Perhaps the most notable of these occasions was that at Reisser's in Philadelphia, May 31, 1890, where Ingersoll spoke and where occurred the

debate upon immortality between Ingersoll and Whitman, partly reported in *In Re Walt Whitman*.

Whitman's last appearance in public was on the occasion of Ingersoll's lecture, *Liberty in Literature*, which was given for his benefit at Horticultural Hall in Philadelphia, October 21, 1890. He was wheeled on to the stage in his chair, and, when the lecture was finished, he said: "After all, my friends, the main factors being the curious testimony called personal presence and face to face meeting, I have come here to be among you and show myself, and thank you with my living voice for coming, and Robert Ingersoll for speaking. And so with such brief testimony of showing myself, and such good will and gratitude, I bid you hail and farewell." There were about eighteen hundred people present, and the proceeds to Whitman were about eight hundred and seventy dollars.

The birthday dinner in 1891 was in his own house, as he was too ill to go out. Thirty-three people were present. Whitman was in bad physical condition, and was almost carried to the table. The conversation around the board — there were no formal speeches — is recorded under the heading, "Round Table with Walt Whitman" in *In Re Walt Whitman*.

In December, 1891, he became so ill that he was declared by the physicians to be dying; but he rallied somewhat, and lived till March 26, 1892. During these last months, although suffering great pain, his cheerfulness was unimpaired, and the end came simply and peacefully. He was conscious to the last, calm and undisturbed.

The funeral on March 30, while devoid of form or ceremony, was perhaps the most remarkable demonstration that ever occurred in this country in connection with the obsequies of a private citizen.

From eleven till two a stream of people, thousands in number, passed through the parlor of the little house to look upon the face of the dead poet. On the way to the cemetery the road was thronged with people. At the graveside, stretching up the hillside and down toward the lake as far as the eye could reach, was an uncounted multitude, eager to catch the words of the speakers, Ingersoll and the rest; and in their presence the body of the great poet of Democracy was laid away.

#### IV. RETROSPECT AND CONCLUSION.

*My foothold is tenon'd and mortis'd in  
granite,  
I laugh at what you call dissolution,  
And I know the amplitude of time.*

THE brief sketch of the objective career of Walt Whitman is thus closed ; but his true life is only to be read in his *Leaves of Grass* and in his prose writing, which is the best commentary on his poems. Not the least remarkable feature of Whitman's career and that of his book is the singular pertinacity with which he carried out the work he had determined upon. It was his original intention that it should cover his whole lifetime, and from this plan he never swerved nor faltered. The book was planned before he was thirty years of age, actually begun a little later, and completed only on his death-bed. He intended it, as he many times said, as the expression of the personality of the American man.

This personality is to be developed through individualism, comradeship, spirituality. To use his own words,—

“My comrade!

For you to share with me two great-  
nesses, and a third one rising in-  
clusive and more resplendent,

The greatness of Love and Democracy,  
and the greatness of Religion.”

The oft-repeated charge of egotism, in the narrow sense of the word, rests solely upon a small and distorted construction of detached passages. The “Myself” is “the Average Man,”—any man,—the “personal critter,” as Whitman was fond of saying in conversation. He would accept nothing that all could not have the counterpart of on equal terms, and “nothing, not God is greater to one than one’s self is.” “He does not outline, but he forecasts a new religion and a new order of the state, the amplitude and splendor of humanity.”

The denial of the charge of egotism

applies of course only to the paltry egotism of personal vanity. In the splendid self-assertion of genius he is no more deficient than Montaigne when in the preface to his *Essays* he says: "I desire therein to be delineated in mine owne genuine, simple and ordinarie fashion, without contention, art or study; for it is myselfe I pourtray. My imperfections shall therein be read to the life, and my naturall forme discerned, so farre-forth as publike reverence hath permitted me. For if my fortune had beene to have lived among those nations which yet are said to live under the sweet liberty of Nature's first and uncorrupted lawes, I assure thee, I would most willingly have pourtrayed myselfe fully and naked. Thus, gentle Reader, myselfe am the ground-worke of my booke." His egotism was not different in quality from that of Francis Bacon when he declared that he had taken all knowledge to be his province; or

Shakespeare when he wrote the fifty-fifth sonnet : —

“Not marble, nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful  
rhyme ;  
But you shall shine more bright in  
these contents  
Than unswept stone, besmear'd with  
sluttish time.”

In like spirit Whitman said : —

“I know I am august,  
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.)

“I exist as I am, that is enough,  
If no other in the world be aware I sit  
content,  
And if each and all be aware I sit con-  
tent.

“One world is aware and by far the larg-  
est to me, and that is myself.”



It is true that in his thought the universe is ego-centric ; but the central *Ego* is no more Walt Whitman than any other man or woman. It is "you, whoever you are."

"We thought our Union grand, and our  
Constitution grand,  
I do not say they are not grand and  
good, for they are,  
I am this day just as much in love with  
them as you,  
Then I am in love with You, and with  
all my fellows upon the earth.

"We consider bibles and religions di-  
vine -- 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 out of you."

It is quite evident that Whitman felt that he had a cause, and that to it he de-

liberately devoted his life's work; that he felt the cause to be of supreme importance and himself to be the prophet of it,—if this be egotism, the critics are free to make the most of it. He showed no egotism in the sense of claiming individual superiority over any of his fellow-men. On the contrary, his attitude was that of one who could approach “the President at his levee” or “Cudge in the sugar field,” and greet each on equal terms; and this is manifested as well in his life as in his work.

We sometimes hear it said that Whitman was “devoid of the sense of humor.” It is a little uncertain just what is meant by this phrase. Of course, he was not a humorous man in the sense that Dr. Holmes was; nor was he especially brilliant in conversation, though he was fully appreciative of a humorous situation. If a lack of the sense of humor means—as I have sometimes heard it defined—taking one's self too seriously,

the question has been considered in the discussion of egotism. My own understanding of the phrase "sense of humor," in its deepest meaning, is a sense of the due proportion of things, with keen perception of incongruities; and, so considered, it appears to me that Whitman had the sense of humor in the highest degree. A deep, pervasive, subtle humor permeates his work. Take, for example, such lines as these in the "Song of Myself": —

"I think I could turn and live with  
animals, they are so placid and self-  
contain'd,  
I stand and look at them long and long.

"They do not sweat and whine about  
their condition,  
They do not lie awake in the dark and  
weep for their sins,  
They do not make me sick discussing  
their duty to God,  
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is  
demented with the mania of owning  
things,

Not one kneels to another, nor to his  
kind that lived thousands of years  
ago,  
Not one is respectable or unhappy over  
the whole earth.

“So they show their relations to me and  
I accept them,  
They bring me tokens of myself, they  
evince them plainly in their posses-  
sion.”

It may be that the lack of the sense of  
humor — that is, of due proportion — is  
the critic's.

Two sections of *Leaves of Grass*, “Children of Adam” and “Calamus,” seem to call for a few words of special notice. The first of these is a celebration of the sex function, not in the way of chivalric sentiment, but rather by exalting the nobleness and dignity of fatherhood and motherhood and the sacredness of the natural sex relation in itself. Whitman's treatment of this subject has been assailed with a degree of vehemence that

could have had its origin only in prudery and pruriency, twin offspring of mediæval asceticism. In spite of all opposition, Whitman adhered to his own idea in this matter, and to the last considered it the rock-bed foundation of his work. "Sex will not be put aside; it is a great ordinance of the universe," he said in the first preface.

Perhaps the most convincing testimony that can be offered in support of Whitman's treatment of the matter of sex will be to show how "Children of Adam" impressed a noble and high-minded woman, who was, at that time, entirely uninfluenced by any personal acquaintance with their author. Reference has already been made to Mrs. Gilchrist, whose letters, written in 1869 to William Michael Rossetti, were considered by him the most valuable appreciation of Whitman which has been put into writing, "because it is the expression of what a woman sees in Whitman's poems,— a

woman who has read and thought much, and whom to know is to respect and esteem in every relation, whether of character, intellect, or culture." It is to be regretted that space will not permit the reprinting here of the entire text of her comments, at least upon these particular poems; but these brief extracts will indicate their tenor, and, it is hoped, lead the reader to a perusal of the whole of her splendid defence : —

“You argued rightly that my confidence would not be betrayed by any of the poems in this book. None of them troubled me even for a moment; because I saw at a glance that it was not, as men had supposed, the heights brought down to the depths, but the depths lifted up level with the sunlit heights, that they might become clear and sunlit too. Always, for a woman, a veil woven out of her own soul — never touched upon even, with a rough hand, by this poet. But, for a man, a daring,

fearless pride in himself, not a mock-modesty woven out of delusions — a very poor imitation of a woman's. Do they not see that this fearless pride, this complete acceptance of themselves, is needful for her pride, her justification? . . .

“ ‘The full spread pride of man is calming and excellent to the soul,’ — of a woman above all. It is true that instinct of silence I spoke of is a beautiful, imperishable part of nature too. But it is not beautiful when it means an ignominious shame brooding darkly. Shame is like a very flexible veil, that follows faithfully the shape of what it covers — beautiful when it hides a beautiful thing, ugly when it hides an ugly one. It has not covered what was beautiful here; it has covered a mean distrust of a man's self and of his Creator. It was needed that this silence, this evil spell, should for once be broken, and the daylight let in, that

the dark cloud lying under might be scattered to the winds. It was needed that one who could here indicate for us 'the part between reality and the soul' should speak. That is what these beautiful, despised poems, the 'Children of Adam,' do, read by the light that glows out of the rest of the volume."

The section entitled "Calamus" exalts the splendor of the friendship between man and man, which is here glorified in a manner elsewhere unknown and unapproached in modern times. Not alone do these glowing poems — of which it has been said that they make other writings on friendship seem frigid and calculating — celebrate the individual joy and satisfaction of comrade love; they have also a deeper significance and a relation to the body politic. Whitman saw in "the manly love of comrades" a solvent for the evils of our civilization to-day, and the hope of the true and ideal Democracy of the Future.



“Affection shall solve every one of the problems of freedom.”

“The dependence of Liberty shall be lovers.

The continuance of Equality shall be comrades.”

The title of the section subtly represents the spirit of the poems. “Walt’s symbol of manly affection,” says William Sloane Kennedy, —“the sweet flag, or calamus,— belongs among the grasses, and like them suggests equality and brotherhood. It is found in vast masses in marshy ground, growing in fascicles of three, four, or five blades, which cling together for support, shoulder to shoulder and back to back, the delicate ‘pink-tinged’ roots exhaling a faint fragrance, not only when freshly gathered, but after having been kept many years.”

It is not surprising that some of the poems in this section have presented difficulties of analysis to the critics, so

subtle is the expression and so mystical the thought. Whitman once said to Horace Traubel that "Calamus" would never be understood until we should have developed a race of men and women whose love is capable, at times, of obliterating all boundaries of sex.

There is a notion more or less prevalent that Whitman composed very carelessly on the spur of the moment, in a sort of haphazard manner. Nothing could be farther from the fact.

"And that he  
Who casts to write a living line must  
sweat,—  
Such as thine are,—and strike the second heat  
Upon the Muses' anvil; turn the same,  
And himself with it, that he thinks to  
frame."

In 1899 Dr. Bucke published a large quarto volume of *Notes and Fragments Left by Walt Whitman*, which contains first drafts and rejected passages from *Leaves of Grass*; notes on the meaning

and intention of the same ; memoranda from books and from the poet's own reflections, indicating his preparatory reading and thought ; and suggestive words and expressions, all showing that almost every phrase had been thought out and carefully considered and reconsidered. Whitman once told John Burroughs that he had been searching for twenty-five years for the word to express what the twilight song of the robin meant to him. One critic said Whitman "often stumbled" on just the right words in just the right order. These are the words of which Ruskin said "they are deadly true — in the sense of rifles — against all our deadliest sins." This the author of whom Ingersoll said, "He uttered more supreme words than any other writer of our century." "Stumbled" !— well, the highest art is that which conceals art.

His own generation of literary men in America, with the exception of Emer-

son, Thoreau, Alcott, Moncure Conway, Charles A. Dana, and a few others — some of them important exceptions, to be sure — would none of him ; and the professional literary critics were down on him to a man. Lowell, Holmes, Whittier, and most of the New England group could see nothing good in the book. Bayard Taylor wrote an abusive attack on it in the *New York Tribune*, and Whittier threw the 1855 edition that Whitman sent him into the fire. Most, if not all, of these, however, while never becoming reconciled to the book, did come to have a genuine and warm respect and esteem for Whitman personally, as is witnessed by their cordial messages to him on the occasions of his birthday celebrations and in many other ways.

With the younger generation of literary men the case is very different ; and all, almost without exception, not only in England and America, but also on the

continent of Europe, acknowledge his influence, and show it in their writings. This is, of course, exactly what was to be expected in the case of one who adopted such radical departures from recognized canons of literary art ; and it is natural that professional literary men should be the first, last, and most strenuous to resist such innovations. Even Emerson, notwithstanding his enthusiastic letter, did not include Whitman in his *Parnassus*. Time and distance are necessary for the perspective of great objects,—witness the case of Shakespeare, to cite but one instance,—and the time has not even yet come to form a true estimate of Whitman's work. The final estimate is a matter for the judgment of coming centuries. At present it may at least be said that all active opposition to his work has ceased, and that it is universally recognized as a force in American thought and letters to be met and dealt with.

The recent successful production of a luxurious subscription edition of *The Writings of Walt Whitman* in ten volumes demonstrates a certain kind of success, to say nothing of the fact that in that edition 98 pages are devoted entirely to bibliography. Slurs on Whitman now emanate from only a few hack writers for newspapers and a few college professors of a very crude type, whose knowledge of life and the world is bounded by their narrow field of academic studies.

Not only are Whitman's works extensively read in England, but they have been translated, either wholly or in part, into French by Gabriel Sarrazin, into German by Freiligrath, into Danish by Rudolph Schmidt, into Dutch by Mauritz Wagenvoort, and into Italian by Luigi Gamberale. There is also a Russian translation, and the late Sir Edwin Arnold translated selections into several Asiatic languages.

Whitman spun no intellectual cobwebs, nor did he wander in the maze of German metaphysics. Nevertheless, he is a philosophic thinker; but his views seem to be reached rather by intuition than by logic. "Logic and sermons never convince," he says. It is not probable that he had read Hegel before beginning to write; but he read him later, and found something in common with him, as is implied in the stanza in "By the Roadside,"—

"Roaming in thought over the Universe,  
I saw the little that is Good  
steadily hastening towards immortality,  
And the vast all that is call'd Evil I  
saw hastening to merge itself and  
become lost and dead."

It is probable that Hegel's idealism attracted him, and that his "rule of right"—"Be a person, and respect other persons"—appealed to him forcibly; but it is certain that he did not follow

Hegel in such practical applications of his philosophy as the absolute supremacy of the State, capital punishment, and the indissolubility of the marriage relation. In Whitman's note-book which passed into Dr. Bucke's possession after Whitman's death are notes for a lecture on Hegel, from which I extract the following : —

“Only Hegel is fit for America — is large enough and free enough. Absorbing his speculations and imbued by his letter and spirit, we bring to the study of life here and the thought of hereafter, in all its mystery and vastness, an expansion and clearness of sense before unknown. As a face in a mirror we see the world of materials, nature with all its objects, processes, shows, reflecting the human spirit and by such reflection formulating, identifying, developing and proving it. Body and mind are one; an inexplicable paradox, yet no truth truer. The human soul stands in



the centre, and all the universes minister to it, and serve it and revolve round it. They are one side of the whole and it is the other side. It escapes utterly from all limits, dogmatic standards and measurements and adjusts itself to the ideas of God, of space, and to eternity, and sails them at will as oceans, and fills them as beds of oceans."

In spite of some of the marked resemblances of Whitman's philosophic thought to that of Emerson, we have his positive word that he had not read Emerson until after writing the first version of *Leaves of Grass*; and yet it is there that the resemblance is the most marked.

It has been charged that Whitman's verse is uncouth and formless. Let us see how the charge has been answered. "In the rhythm of certain poets," says Emerson, "there is no manufacture, but a vortex or musical tornado, which falling on words and the experience of a

learned mind whirl these materials into the same grand order as planets or moons obey, and seasons and monsoons." Elsewhere he says, "The difference between poetry and stock poetry is this, that in the latter the rhythm is given and the sense adapted to it, while in the former the sense dictates the rhythm." So Carrière in his work, *The Essence and the Forms of Poetry*, says that in the true work of art the form grows out of the idea, is its organic outcome. Jannaccone has shown this to be the case with the poetry of Whitman. In *La Poesia di Walt Whitman e l' Evoluzione delle Forme Ritmiche* he says : —

"The rhythm of Whitman has a structure and form eminently spiritual like primitive poetry. This return toward primitive form is in accordance with the evolution of the modern poetic form, which tends to give increasing predominance to the logical element. Thus the Whitmanic rhythm is free from those

characteristics belonging to the modern poetic form which distinguish the latter from primitive poetry.

“This greater semblance of the Whitmanic rhythm to primitive poetry is due to two causes: (a) Not only the rhythm, — the formal element, — but also the substantial part of Whitman’s work, has a character in common with the great poems of the beginning of civilization. A colony that reproduces the primitive economical and social forms reproduces also the primitive forms of arts. (b) The psychic structure of the Whitmanic rhythm is, moreover, determined by a psycho-physiological factor, — the independence of the thought.”

John Addington Symonds was certainly a competent critic of poetic form, and this is what he says in his *Walt Whitman: A Study*: —

“The countless clear and perfect phrases he invented, to match most delicate and evanescent moods of sensibility,

to picture exquisite and broad effects of natural beauty, to call up poignant or elusive feelings, attest to his artistic faculty of using language as a vehicle for thought. They are hung, like golden medals of consummate workmanship and incised form, in rich clusters over every poem he produced. And, what he aimed at above all, these phrases are redolent of the very spirit of the emotions they suggest, communicate the breadth and largeness of the things they indicate, embody the essence of realities in living words which palpitate and burn forever.

“I do not think it needful to quote examples. Those who demur and doubt may address themselves to an impartial study of his writings. It is enough for me, trained in Greek and Latin classics, in the literatures of Italy and France and Germany and England, who have spent my life in continuous addiction to literature, and who am the devotee of what is powerful and beautiful in style,—it is

enough for me to pledge my reputation as a critic upon what I have asserted."

Whitman's rhythm is certainly not the rhythm of the tom-tom or of "glib piano tunes." It is the rhythm of the streams, of the ocean billows and the breakers on the shore, sometimes of the tornado and the thunder-crash. It is the rhythm of the great sweeps of country and of the open sea, the rhythm of teeming, tumultuous cities and of myriads of bustling industries; but with the clang of factories and the storm of battle mingle the wave-beats on Paumanok's shore, the bravuras of birds in the forests, the song of the mocking-bird and the hermit thrush, all blended in a mighty symphony. The beautiful, gentle god walks the old hills of Judea by your side in that rhythm. In it America arms for the fray which is to be her struggle for existence. In it are the shrieks and groans of battle, the shouts of victory, and the agony of the nation

when her martyr-chief falls at the moment of triumph and reconciliation. And pulsating under all this and through all this are the great themes, Individualism, Comradeship, and the promise of a new and greater Religion, the Religion of Democracy.

So much for the form, but the form is but the means to the end ; and the end is to help men and women. Has it done so ? Let Symonds — one among many — answer. In his essay on Walt Whitman he declared that *Leaves of Grass* had influenced him more, perhaps, than any book except the Bible, — more than Plato, more than Goethe. It taught him, he said, to comprehend the harmony between the democratic spirit, science, and that larger religion to which the world is being led by the conception of human brotherhood and by the spirituality inherent in any really scientific view of the universe. It inspired him with faith, and made him feel that op-

timism was not unreasonable. It gave him great cheer in evil years of enforced idleness, due to ill-health. It opened his eyes to the beauty, goodness, and greatness which may be found in all worthy human beings, the humblest and the highest. What Whitman had done for him, he felt he will do for others if they will only approach him in a spirit of confidence and open-mindedness.

Whitman's ethics is not of the letter, but of the spirit. He never preaches. With "Thou shalt not" he has no concern. He knows nothing of arbitrary rewards and punishments. He says little or nothing of duty. This spirit, is nothing that can be expressed in a formula or represented by a dogma or proved by logic. It is a life,—a life of faith without dogma, of acceptance without argument, of love of nature and of man, without exception or limitation.

"This is what you shall do": he says, "Love the earth and sun and the

animals, despise riches, give alms to every one that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown, or to any man or number of men — go freely with powerful uneducated persons, and with the young, and with the mothers of families — re-examine all you have been told in school or church or in any book, and dismiss whatever insults your own soul ; and your very flesh shall be a great poem, and have the richest fluency, not only in its words, but in the silent lines of its lips and face, and between the lashes of your eyes, and in every motion and joint of your body.’’

He who goes to Walt Whitman for definite results or for a formulated system of philosophy or for a crystallized plan for social or economic reform or for a precise scheme of ontology will be dis-



appointed. Whitman does not deal with chords of circles. He bristles with tangents. "For it is not for what I have put into it," he says, "that I have written this book, nor by reading that you will acquire it." The reader is taken into the poet's confidence, into partnership. He is given a start, and told to go. Whitman answers no questions: he asks unanswerable questions.

"I have no chair, no church, no philosophy,  
 I lead no man to a dinner-table, library, exchange,  
 But each man and each woman of you  
 I lead upon a knoll,  
 My left hand hooking you round the waist,  
 My right hand pointing to landscapes  
 of continents and the public road.

"Not I, not any one else can travel  
 that road for you,  
 You must travel it for yourself.

"It is not far, it is within reach,  
 Perhaps you have been on it since  
 you were born and did not know,

Perhaps it is everywhere on water and on land."

If thought is not invigorated and hope and faith and love stimulated, it is naught; the reader had best put down the book, and depart on his way.

"For all is useless without that which you may guess at many times and not hit, that which I hinted at."

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The standard editions of the works of Walt Whitman are published by Small, Maynard & Company, Boston, in four volumes, as follows: (a) *Leaves of Grass* (containing all of Whitman's poetry), (b) *Complete Prose Works*, (c) *Calamus* (Letters, 1868-1880, to Peter Doyle), (d) *The Wound Dresser* (hospital letters in war time). The first two of these volumes, issued uniform, include Whitman's works as published during his lifetime, and, with the exception of a small section of posthumous additions, are an exact reprint of the edition revised by him upon his death-bed. The two volumes of letters were edited by Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke, one of his literary executors.

The contents of these volumes, together with some collected fragments of Whitman's writings, variorum readings, and very valuable introductory, critical, and

bibliographical material contributed by Whitman's literary executors and by Oscar Lovell Triggs, Ph.D., have recently been issued in a sumptuous ten-volume subscription edition published by G. P. Putnam's Sons.

These two editions are the only ones authorized by Whitman's literary executors; and, as all of Whitman's writings since 1876 are still protected by copyright, these are the only editions now on the market which are in any sense complete or to be depended upon for accuracy.

The earlier editions of *Leaves of Grass* are all out of print, most of them are scarce, and many of them command a high price. As Whitman made many alterations in the texts of his various editions, all of them are valuable for reference and comparison.

Mention should also be made of *Notes and Fragments Left by Walt Whitman*, edited by Dr. Bucke and originally

privately published by him in 1899 in an edition of 225 copies. The complete text of this valuable book has been reprinted in the Putnam Subscription Edition noted above.

The authorized volume of selections from Whitman is published by Small, Maynard & Company, and is entitled *Selections from the Prose and Poetry of Walt Whitman*, edited with an Introduction by Oscar Lovell Triggs.

An exhaustive bibliography, covering not only all editions of Whitman's works and books about Whitman, but also all important periodical contributions to the subject, has been prepared by Dr. Triggs, and is published in Volume X. of the Putnam Subscription Edition, where it fills 98 octavo pages. Dr. Triggs has also published a briefer but still an excellent working bibliography in his *Selections from the Prose and Poetry of Walt Whitman*. For the present volume, therefore, all that is deemed neces-

sary is to point out a few of the most important books and articles relating to Whitman and his work. These are :—

- ✓ I. THE GOOD GRAY POET : A VINDICATION. By William Douglas O'Connor (New York, 1866). The original brochure is very scarce, but the entire text is reprinted in Dr. Bucke's *Walt Whitman* (See No. IV. below).
- II. A WOMAN'S ESTIMATE OF WALT WHITMAN. By Anne Gilchrist. Letters to William Michael Rossetti published in ✓ *The Radical*, Boston, May, 1870. Reprinted in *In Re Walt Whitman* (see No. V. below). An enthusiastic appreciation, especially valuable for its defence of the "Children of Adam" poems.
- ✓ III. NOTES ON WALT WHITMAN AS POET AND PERSON. By John Burroughs (New York, 1867). Contains much interesting personal information, and was written during the days of the author's closest intimacy with Whitman.

IV. WALT WHITMAN. By Richard Maurice Bucke, M.D. (Philadelphia, 1883). In addition to being the authorized biography (and the only one hitherto issued), this volume is especially valuable for containing a history of the growth of *Leaves of Grass*, an analysis of Whitman's poetry, an appendix of contemporary criticism, and a reprint of O'Connor's *The Good Gray Poet*.

V. IN RE WALT WHITMAN. Edited by his literary executors, Horace L. Traubel, Richard Maurice Bucke, Thomas B. Harned (Philadelphia, 1893). Intended by its editors as a supplementary volume to Dr. Bucke's *Walt Whitman*, this book contains a wealth of valuable and interesting material. It reprints many important articles about Whitman from scarce or inaccessible sources, together with translations from foreign languages and not a little original matter.

- ✓ VI. WALT WHITMAN: A STUDY. By John Addington Symonds (London, 1893). Perhaps the finest critical appreciation of Whitman's work which has yet appeared, except for the wretched quagmire into which the author has allowed himself to be led by his morbid misinterpretation of a few lines in one group of the poems.
- ✓ VII. REMINISCENCES OF WALT WHITMAN, WITH EXTRACTS FROM HIS LETTERS AND REMARKS ON HIS WRITINGS. By William Sloane Kennedy (London, 1896). A delightful volume of *personalia*, with many glimpses of deep critical insight into Whitman's philosophy.
- ✓ VIII. WHITMAN, A STUDY. By John Burroughs (Boston, 1896). A sane and thoroughly appreciative final statement after many years of familiarity with Whitman and his work.
- IX. DIARY NOTES OF A VISIT TO WALT WHITMAN AND SOME OF HIS



FRIENDS IN 1880. By John Johnston, M.D. (Manchester, England, 1898). A vivid personal portrait by a close observer.

X. THE NEW SPIRIT. By Havelock Ellis (London, 1890) contains an excellent critical chapter on Whitman, with correlative consideration of Emerson and Thoreau.

XI. AMERICAN BOOKMEN. By M. A. DeWolfe Howe. The chapter on Whitman gives a clear brief critical estimate from the viewpoint of one of the younger critics of the present generation.

XII. THE CONSERVATOR. Horace Traubel, editor, published monthly in Philadelphia. Contains many valuable papers relating to Whitman, running through the entire period of its existence, from 1890 to the present time.



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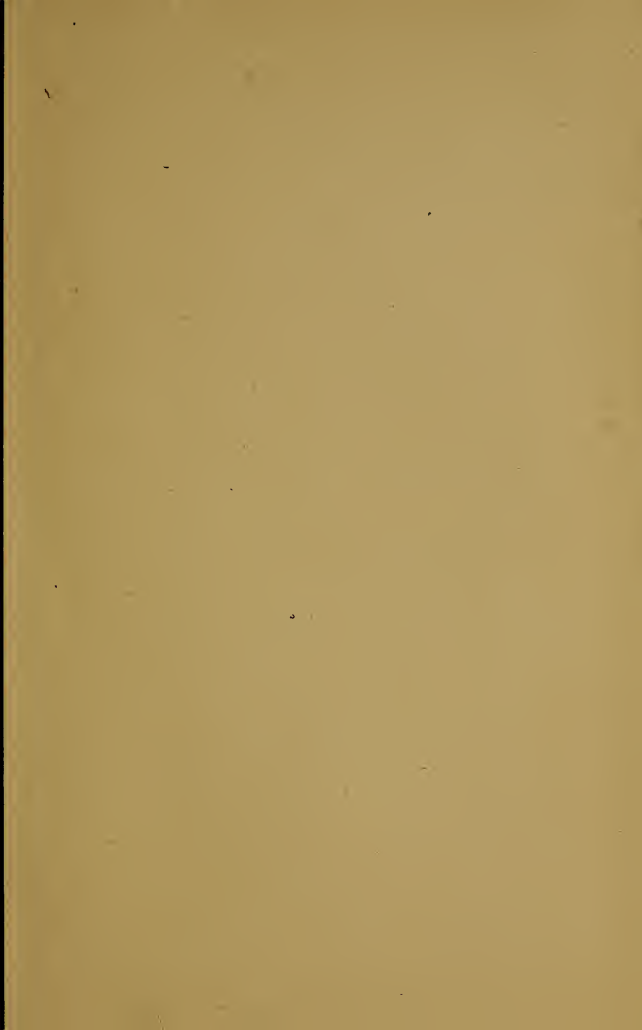
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