NOTES

ON

WALT WHITMAN,

As Poet and Person.

By John Burroughs.

SECOND EDITION.

NEW YORK:
J. S. Redfield, 140 Fulton Street.
1871.

PREFACE.

ALTHOUGH Walt Whitman, as Poet and Person, remains yet comparatively an unknown, unregarded figure upon the vast and crowded canvas of our age, I feel—for reasons attempted to be set forth in the following pages—that I am in some sort called upon to jot down, while they are vivid upon me, my observations of him and his writings. And I wish to give, without delay, a fair hint of the attitude my Notes hold toward their subject, and of the premises they assume and start from.

In History, at wide intervals, in different fields of action, there come (it is a thrice-told tale,) special developments of individualities, and of that something we suggest by the word Genius—individuals whom their own days little suspect, and never realize, but who, it turns out, mark and make new eras, plant the standard again ahead, and in one man personify vast races or sweeping revolutions. I consider Walt Whitman such an individual. I consider that America is illustrated in him; and that Democracy, as now

launched forth upon its many-vortexed experiment for good or evil, (and the end whereof no eye can foresee,) is embodied, and for the first time in Poetry grandly and fully uttered, in him.

My Notes come from personal contact, and doubtless from thoughts brought under that influence. The literary hints in them are experimental, and will show the student of Nature more than the student of books.

I confess I shelter much that I have written, within the conviction that almost any statement, touched from life, of a man already the subject of peculiar interest to choice circles both in this country and in Europe, and destined to a general renown unlike any other—the renown of personal endearment—will prove welcome.

And so I give them forth—crude and ill-put as doubtless they will appear to the better judges—yet hoping that they too may serve.

NOTE *to Second Edition*.—The following essay, as far as page 108, having been issued in 1867, was based of course on the editions of LEAVES OF GRASS anterior to that time, of 1855, '57, '60, and especially of 1866-7. The last-named and fourth, though mentioned on page 22 following as "the completed edition," has now been superceded by a later and fuller one, the fifth, (see page 109 following;) the "exception" mentioned on page 22, and the "part still lacking," alluded to on page 71 of the present work, having necessitated, as appears, not only an important addition of new LEAVES, but a re-arrangement of the old ones.

The whole Volume being, in some respects, best understood when viewed as a series of growths, or strata, rising or starting out from a settled foundation or centre, and expanding in successive accumulations, I have thought it allowable to let my Notes, even pages 22 and 23, remain as they were originally jotted down, notwithstanding that I might alter certain passages if written over again now, and that a few lines are rendered superfluous; but as they stand they in some sort represent the changes and stages alluded to, especially those signified by the edition of 1866-7. The Supplementary Notes commencing page 109 present what I have to say of the book of 1871-2.

It will be borne in mind that the present Notes were not designed merely for literary criticism of Walt Whitman's poems. While these poems certainly present difficult problems, and need study and time to their appreciation, I believe that from what has already been written concerning them, the determined investigator, amid many contradictory speculations and reviews, will be able to glean the materials of the truth. [See LEAVES OF GRASS IMPRINTS, 64 pages, 16 mo. Boston, Thayer & Eldridge, 1860; THE GOOD GRAY POET, A Vindication, by W. D. O'Connor, 46 pages, 8vo. New York, Bunce & Huntington; *A Woman's Estimate of Walt Whitman*, THE RADICAL, May, 1870, Boston.] But I desire, also, to put on record, out of my own observations, continued since the opening of the war down to the present hour, and from the point of view of those who have known him best from childhood, and especially during these current years, an outline of the veritable form, manners, and doings of the man, and of his life, as he actually lives it to-day. There will come a time when these things will be invaluable.

J. B., June, 1871.

☞ The reader of the LEAVES, in their permanent form of 1871-2, will take notice that several of the pieces criticized in the present Notes, from pages 22 to 64, and 91 to 105, are not now to be found in the localities or connections specified, but in others. The names of two or three pieces are also changed.

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PART FIRST.

LEAVES OF GRASS.

Formerly, during the period termed classic, when literature was governed by recognized rules, he was considered the best poet who had composed the most perfect work, the most beautiful poem, the most intelligible, the most agreeable to read, the most complete in every respect,—the Æneid, the Gerusalemme, a fine tragedy.

To-day, something else is wanted. For us, the greatest poet is he who in his works most stimulates the reader's imagination and reflection, who excites him the most himself to poetize. The greatest poet is not he who has done the best; it is he who suggests the most; he, not all of whose meaning is at first obvious, and who leaves you much to desire, to explain, to study, much to complete in your turn.—[Sainte-Beuve. *Nouveaux Lundis.* (*New Mondays.*) *Article on "The Last Five Months of the Life of Racine."* *Volume X. Paris edition*, 1868.]

LEAVES OF GRASS.

FIRST ACQUAINTANCE.

1.

PERHAPS I can open my subject no better than by simply telling where and how it began with me. Born and raised near the head waters of the Delaware, in New York, the world of my practical experience was confined to that healthy but rather wild and bleak region, till I had become a well-grown country youth, curious about books—fond even then of the Emersonian essays and poems, and all of that ilk; but my life mainly occupied in farm work in the summer, and with a little study, offset by much hunting and trapping wild animals, in winter.

From a child I was familiar with the homely facts of the barn, and of cattle and horses; the sugar-making in the maple woods in early spring; the work of the corn-field, hay-field, potato-field; the delicious fall months, with their pigeon and squirrel shootings; threshing of buckwheat, gathering of apples, and burning of fallows; in short, everything that smacked of, and led to, the open air and its exhilarations. I belonged, as I may say, to them; and my substance and taste, as they grew, assimilated them as truly as my body did its food. I loved a few books much; but

I loved Nature, in all those material examples and subtle expressions, with a love passing all the books of the world.

Appropriately enough, I at this time, 1861, first made the acquaintance of LEAVES OF GRASS, in the woods. Visiting a friend in the eastern part of the State, I recall that as we went out on a nutting excursion he carried with him this singular-looking book, from which he read to me as we paused in our tramp. I shall never forget the strange delight I had from the following passage, as we sat there on the sunlit border of an autumn forest:

"I lie abstracted, and hear beautiful tales of things, and the reasons of things;
They are so beautiful, I nudge myself to listen.

I cannot say to any person what I hear—I cannot say it to myself—it is very wonderful.

It is no small matter, this round and delicious globe, moving so exactly in its orbit forever and ever, without one jolt, or the untruth of a single second;
I do not think it was made in six days, nor in ten thousand years, nor ten billions of years,
Nor plann'd and built one thing after another, as an architect plans and builds a house."

I shortly after procured the volume—the Boston edition of 1860. I read it attentively, and, as I supposed then, understood it. At any rate I understood it thus far, that, as a written poem, or whatever it was, it produced the impression upon me in my moral consciousness that actual Nature did in her material forms and shows. This sort of impression no book had ever before made upon me. I had enjoyed the good of other books greatly, but it had never occurred to me to recognize them as in any way equal to a

fine sunrise morning, or a solitary and dim old hemlock forest, or as containing qualities at all akin to these.

Of course, I became very curious about Walt Whitman himself, but found little satisfaction in the magazine and newspaper notices current at that time, and more or less current down to this day. According to those veracious paragraphs, the man was a mixture of the belligerent, the libidinous, and the buffoon. The prevailing authorities made him a Broadway stage-driver, fearfully and wonderfully dressed, who occasionally dismounted from the box and spent a certain time in cooking up strange messes, *olla podridas*, of the English language, which he mixed together and printed.

However, I found articles of another sort about Whitman in the old *New York Saturday Press*, which I received every week. That paper spoke warmly and persistently in his behalf. But the slurs and abusive tirades of the press, of all grades, largely preponderated.

As to the book itself, I continued to read it, taking it with me Sundays away off on the hills. I soon began to notice that it held perpetual strata, or backgrounds, of meanings, and pictorial and panoramic effects. I thought I understood any certain piece, at a certain time; but a week or two afterward, reading it again, I would invariably find new, and sometimes far wider and superior meanings. This process, thus began, has continued now for more than five years. Like the face of the sky, and the spread of the landscape, LEAVES OF GRASS, though the same, has the character of always, at any view, presenting different combinations from any previous view.

Some of the effects produced in and upon me at that

period are interwoven in the following Notes; but the great charm which the book had to me, as a young man, full of inquiry, full of emotion—full, it may be, of doubt—desiring to come in contact with people and with truth—as well as the moral service it rendered me—are beyond statement. It was a new kind of help, not in the ordinary way of knowledge, but in a way far more rare and precious. It strengthened my faith, and very curiously wrought upon and contributed to my sense of self, my personality.

II.

In the fall of 1863 I left New York, and, desirous of being nearer the war, and perhaps taking a hand in it, wandered southward as far as Washington. I did not become a soldier, however; circumstances determined otherwise, and I settled down as a resident of the national capital, and so have since remained.

Mr. Whitman was at Washington in 1862 and 1863, engaged in the army hospitals. I easily found him out, as he had become well known around the city, and soon made his acquaintance. I had met him once or twice without our interviews amounting to much, as I found him, although cheerful and friendly, not at all inclined to talk on any such subjects as poetry or metaphysics; when on one of my Sunday afternoon rambles in the woods, two or three miles from Washington, I plumply encountered him traveling along a foot-path between the trees, with a well-stuffed haversack slung over his shoulder, and the pockets of his overcoat also filled. He was on his way to some army hospital barracks in the vicinity, and, with his permission, I accompanied him.

In an ensuing section I shall give a sketch of his hospital career. Yet a written sketch is a poor, weak thing, in such a matter. The actual scene, as I saw it, of this man moving among the maimed, the pale, the low-spirited, the near-to-death, with all the incidents and the interchanges between him and those suffering ones, often young almost to childhood, can hardly be pictured by any pen, however expert. His magnetism was incredible and exhaustless. It is no figure of speech, but a fact deeper than speech. The lustreless eye brightened up at his approach; his commonplace words invigorated; a bracing air seemed to fill the ward, and neutralize the bad smells. I beheld, in practical force, something like that fervid incantation of one of his own poems:

"To any one dying—thither I speed, and twist the knob of the door;
Turn the bed-clothes toward the foot of the bed;
Let the physician and the priest go home.

I seize the descending man, and raise him with resistless will.

O despairer, here is my neck;
By God! You shall not go down! Hang your whole weight upon me.

I dilate you with tremendous breath—I buoy you up;
Every room of the house do I fill with an arm'd force,
Lovers of me, baffliers of graves."

Dating from this encounter, I had afterward opportunities of seeing Whitman a good deal, and of knowing much about him, both in the general and in the minute. His book and himself now fused in my mind, and, as it were, remained one. Each aided my understanding of the other; much light was cast upon the book by his character, conversation, and ways, and from the new and mysterious

bodily quality of him, which it is impossible to describe, but which none who come into his presence can escape, and which is, perhaps, the analogue to the intuitive quality of his intellect.

Of my attempt, in the latter part of these Notes, to give an outline of the poet's personal history, I will say here, that, man as he is, with just the same points and qualities as the rest of us—when that is distinctly admitted—the deepest meaning of Thoreau's verdict, "After all, he suggests something a little more than human," comes to my apprehension as the final key and result. It probably underlies my biographic sketch of his life.

As will be seen, I have extracted largely from his writings, and have sought mostly to explain him from his own letter and spirit.

LEAVES OF GRASS.

THE EARLIER ISSUES, OR EDITIONS.

III.

In the summer of 1855 a thin quarto volume of a hundred pages, poorly printed, and inscribed in great letters on the title-page, LEAVES OF GRASS, appeared from the press of a small job-office in the city of Brooklyn, New York.

It had no author's name, but there was a frontispiece, a choice and artistic steel engraving, portraying a man somewhere from thirty to thirty-five years of age, quite *negligé*, no coat or vest, shirt open at the neck, one hand in his trowsers pocket, and the other resting on his hip; face bearded, and a felt hat pushed back slightly from the forehead; a mild yet firm enough pair of eyes, and a general expression, not only about the countenance, but equally in the whole figure, that held you looking long at the picture, under a feeling you could hardly account for.

This new arrival in literature, which, at a casual examination, puzzled all known classifications of prose or poetry, had no publisher, and was born very noiselessly and lazily. Some three-score copies were deposited for sale in a bookstore in Brooklyn, and as many more in another store in New York. Weeks elapsed, and not a copy was sold.

Presently there came requests from both the bookstores that the thin quarto should be forthwith removed.

The copies found refuge in a well-known phrenological publishing establishment on Broadway, whose proprietors advertised it, and sent specimen copies to the journals, and to some distinguished persons. The journals remained silent, and of the copies sent to the distinguished persons several were returned with insulting notes. The only reception heard of, was such, for instance, as the use of the volume by the *attaches* of a leading daily paper in New York—collected in a swarm Saturday afternoon, waiting to be paid off—as a butt and burlesque, whose perusal aloud by one of the party, the others lounging or standing around, was equivalent to peals upon peals of ironical laughter from the whole assemblage.

A small but important occurrence seems now to have turned the tide. A letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson, brief, but containing a magnificent eulogium of the book, suddenly appeared. A demand arose, and before many months all the copies of the thin quarto were sold.

[I take occasion to say that Whitman, up to the time he published the quarto edition here mentioned, had never read the Essays or Poems of Mr. Emerson at all. This is positively true. In the summer following that publication, he first became acquainted with the Essays, in this wise: He was frequently in the habit of going down to the seashore at Coney Island, and spending the day bathing in the surf and rambling along the shore, or lounging on the sand; and on one of these excursions he put a volume of Emerson into the little basket containing his dinner and his towel.

There, for the first, he read "Nature," &c. Soon, on similar excursions, the two other volumes followed. Two years still elapsed, however, and after his second edition was issued, before he read Mr. E.'s poems.]

IV.

We must examine this first incarnation of LEAVES OF GRASS a little further before dismissing it. It had one feature that has been omitted from all subsequent editions, namely, a long prefatory essay or dissertation in prose form. A portion of this essay, or whatever it may be called, the author has since incorporated into his subsequent poems. The original, in prose, was devoted chiefly to a consideration of the august character and mission of the poet, more especially of the poet fit for democratic America.

He says the American bard is to be commensurate with the people, and his expression 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 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."

The service the great bard renders to mankind is analagous to the service the eyesight renders the other senses; and, following out the figure, he shows how the eyesight is above proof or explanation, as the poet is:

"The other senses corroborate themselves, but this is removed from any proof but its own, and foreruns the identities of the spiritual world. A single glance of it mocks all the investigations of man, and all the instruments and books of the earth, and all reasoning. What is marvelous? What is unlikely? What is impossible, or baseless, or vague?

after you have once just opened the space of a peach-pit, and given audience to far and near, and to the sunset, and had all things enter with electric swiftness, softly and duly, without confusion or jostling or jam."

"The poetic quality is not marshalled in rhyme, or uniformity, or abstract addresses to things, nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but is the life of these and much else, and is in the soul. . . . The rhythm and uniformity of perfect poems show the full growth of the metrical laws, and bud from them as unerringly and loosely as lilacs or roses on a bush, and take shape as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges and melons and pears, and shed the perfume impalpable to form."

"The art of art, the glory of expression, and the sunshine of the light of letters, is simplicity. Nothing is better than simplicity—nothing can make up for excess, or for the lack of definiteness." . . . "To speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and *insouciance* of the movements of animals, and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside, is the flawless triumph of art."

The following gives his idea of style:

"The greatest poet has less a marked style, and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself. He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome, I will not have in my writing any elegance or effect or originality to hang in the way between me and the rest, like curtains. I will have nothing hang in my way, not the richest curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is. Let who may exalt or startle, or fascinate or soothe, I will have purposes as health or heat or snow has, and be as regardless of observation. What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition."

The body of this edition contained twelve poems, (if we must begin to call them so,) the leading one, since entitled *Walt Whitman*, the one *To Working-Men*, the pieces called *To Get Betimes in Boston Town*, *Burial*, *Sleep-Chasings*, &c.; but they had no names then attached to them. About a

thousand copies were printed, which were sold in less than a year. As it was not stereotyped, this ended the thin quarto, or first issue.

At the present day, a curious person poring over the second-hand book-stalls in side places of northern cities, may light upon a copy of this quarto, for which the stall-keeper will ask him, at least, treble its first price.

v.

Either in 1856 or early in 1857, LEAVES OF GRASS, considerably added to, again appeared in the form of a handy 16mo of 350 pages, published in New York. The most notable addition to this issue was the piece beginning *A Woman waits for Me.* A storm had been muttering before, but at the publication of this piece it burst forth in fullest fury. Every epithet of rancor and opprobrium was showered upon the book and author. The publishers of the second issue were frightened. They had stereotyped the work, and printed and bound a batch of a thousand copies. These they soon sold, remunerating expenses, and then quietly asked to be excused from continuing the book any further.

This second issue had at the end, under the head of *Correspondence*, two letters—first, that of Mr. Emerson before mentioned, and second, a long letter from the new poet to the old one in response. This last epistle has much to say on the subject of what we call our literature, how we have imported it, its foreign and artificial elements, its unnatural traits, etc. The principal assumption is, that a real literature for our nation must be the expression of its native spirit, and also, of its objective facts, its constitution

and manners, the idiosyncracies of the land and the race, and even of the climate and geography. It speaks much of the West, and dwells with fondness upon the land and people there. It has a page respecting women in politics, and in regard to the attainment of greater strength, development, and their "rights"—and boldly proclaims that the social and literary mawkishness which tyrannizes over us on themes relating to sex, must be thoroughly broken down and done away with, before women can advance to any equality with men in the practical fields of life.

VI.

Some three to four years now elapse, and we find a young publishing house in Boston writing to Walt Whitman, and anxious to bring out LEAVES OF GRASS anew, and in better typographical form. This leads to the third or Boston edition of 1860–61, a truly handsome book, in 12mo form, of 456 pages, and containing many additional pieces. The author went on to Boston, where he read the proofs, and remained some months, interested in the city and vicinity, and in the various objects of that part of New England. This visit to Boston occurred in the spring and early summer of 1860, and I have heard Whitman speak of it as one of the pleasantest reminiscences of his life.

After a brief period of activity, however, the new issue, which seemed for the first time to have favorably launched LEAVES OF GRASS on the trade and market, by the hands of men who believed in it, and were determined to give it the best advantages, met with the misfortune of the failure of the publishers, in the business crash which preceded the Southern war. Of the book, in this, its third form, some

four to five thousand copies were eventually sold; following which comes another blank space in its career. A vast absorbing event swallows up all matter of writing or publishing poems, or the consideration of the same. Walt Whitman goes to the scene of war, and during the ensuing years is occupied in new and sad avocations.

VII.

In 1865 he prepares some seventy or eighty pages, to be called DRUM TAPS. Just as the last lines are being put in type occurs the murder of Abraham Lincoln. The poet keeps back what has been already printed, and some two or three months afterward, in his SEQUEL TO DRUM TAPS, adds a requiem for the dead President, and, with some other pieces, joined to the previous part, sends forth the whole in a little volume of a hundred pages.

As I intend to give, by and by, a more elaborate notice of that little volume, I will but say here that DRUM TAPS is neither more nor less than a memorial or monograph of the dead soldiers of the war—of the lost tens of thousands hastily buried in unknown pits—of that part of the army, mainly young men, that went ardently forth in 1861, '2, and '3, from the farmers' houses and city homes of the land, but never again returned.

LEAVES OF GRASS.

REVIEW OF THE COMPLETED POEM.

VIII.

We now come to the finished compilation and issue of these poems. The fourth edition takes the shape of a handy 12mo of about 480 pages, and is stamped on the back:

LEAVES OF GRASS.

Ed'n 1867.

It includes all the pieces in former issues, together with Drum Taps, and finishes with a collection of poems, mostly new, called Songs Before Parting. It is this edition that I make use of in the following remarks and extracts. The poet avers that, perhaps with the exception mentioned in a future part of these Notes, his work is completed, for good or bad.

The book begins with the following, on a leaf by itself. It has the character of sentences graved on the pediment of a building, which you scan while you ascend the steps to pass in:

"INSCRIPTION.

SMALL *is the theme of the following Chant, yet the greatest—namely,* ONE'S-SELF—*that wondrous thing, a simple, separate person. That, for the use of the New World, I sing.*

Man's physiology complete, from top to toe, I sing. Not physiognomy alone, nor brain alone, is worthy for the muse;—I say the Form complete is worthier far. The female, equally with the male, I sing.

Nor cease at the theme of One's-Self. I speak the word of the modern, the word EN-MASSE.

My Days I sing, and the Lands—with interstice I knew of hapless war.

O friend, whoe'er you are, at last arriving hither to commence, I feel through every leaf the pressure of your hand, which I return. And thus upon our journey link'd together let us go."

IX.

In the poem that leads, after this, he begins at Paumanok, (Long Island, his birthplace,) and with a few short and firm strokes opens his general subject. He holds the loftiest tone. No emperor so arrogant. The America of the future is to be his audience. As the long generations wind down the passes of time, he sees them "with faces turned sideways or backwards toward me to listen."

Then more simply he defines his own beginning:

"In the Year 80 of The States,
My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here, from parents the same, and their parents the same,
I, now thirty-six years old, in perfect health, begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance,
(Retiring back a while, sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,)
I harbor, for good or bad—I permit to speak, at every hazard,
Nature now without check, with original energy."

He does not forget the past. He pays obeisance to all

"Dead poets, philosophers, priests,
Martyrs, artists, inventors, governments long since,
Language-shapers on other shores,
Nations once powerful, now reduced, withdrawn, or desolate."

But he declares for the present day, and the New World, as his aim and purpose.

He has a remarkable passage on Religion:

"Each is not for its own sake;
I say the whole earth, and all the stars in the sky, are for Religion's sake.

I say no man has ever yet been half devout enough;
None has ever yet adored or worshipp'd half enough;
None has begun to think how divine he himself is, and how certain the future is."

And again:

"My comrade!
For you, to share with me, two greatnesses—and a third one, rising inclusive and more resplendent,
The greatness of Love and Democracy—and the greatness of Religion.

Melange mine own! the unseen and the seen;
Mysterious ocean where the streams empty;
Prophetic spirit of materials shifting and flickering around me;
Living beings, identities, now doubtless near us, in the air, that we know not of;
Contact daily and hourly that will not release me;
These selecting—these, in hints, demanded of me.

Not he, with a daily kiss, onward from childhood kissing me,
Has winded and twisted around me that which holds me to him,
Any more than I am held to the heavens, to the spiritual world,
And to the identities of the Gods, my lovers, faithful and true,
After what they have done to me, suggesting themes."

With rapid flight he sweeps over all parts of the continent, and ends the piece with a sort of comprehensive hauling into the net of his poetry of every theme afforded by modern practical life, as absorbed in the book now to follow.

x.

The next piece, *Walt Whitman*, the longest in the book, is a microcosm of the whole, and of the poet himself. It was written first in order of time, includes the strongest lights and shades, has the most grace, has a primal freshness as of Paradise itself, has the serenity of the clearest sky, and yet from time to time, and especially in some of the concluding parts, abandons itself to a play of power almost unprecedented in authorship, and reminding one of some huge leviathan sporting and darting and rolling in the measureless ocean. The piece, in its sections, is varied beyond statement, yet all the parts and characters are fused into a perfect coherence. Of many, one; the youth, the lover, the traveler, the father, the priest, the philosopher, the participator in sea fight and land fight, the dreamy ecstatic, are all here, and others besides. Yet the character is one only, moving with astronomical volition through every mood and phase of experience. The poet migrates through all, yet remains himself. He exults like a well-grown joyous child over the facts of his own life, his eyesight, his sense of touch and of hearing, and all the delights and miracles he sees in the objects of the material world. *Walt Whitman* is, in truth, an epic of the senses, passions, attributes of the body and soul. It is especially to it that the first two verses of the *Inscription* apply. It is full of

animality, without doubt; but I think it is fuller of aspiration and even of mysticism. Toward the conclusion of the piece, the following:

"If you would understand me, go to the heights or water-shore;
The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves a key;
The maul, the oar, the hand-saw, second my words.

No shutter'd room or school can commune with me,
But roughs and little children better than they.

The young mechanic is closest to me—he knows me well;
The woodman, that takes his axe and jug with him, shall take me with him all day;
The farm boy, ploughing in the field, feels good at the sound of my voice;
In vessels that sail, my words sail—I go with fishermen and seamen, and love them.

The soldier camp'd, or upon the march, is mine;
On the night ere the pending battle, many seek me, and I do not fail them;
On the solemn night (it may be their last,) those that know me, seek me.

My face rubs to the hunter's face, when he lies down alone in his blanket;
The driver, thinking of me, does not mind the jolt of his wagon;
The young mother and old mother comprehend me;
The girl and the wife rest the needle a moment, and forget where they are;
They and all would resume what I have told them."

I can but repeat, without undertaking any analysis, that in this piece are the germs of the entire collection,—and pass on.

XI.

A main point of the bold and over-arching philosophy of Walt Whitman is that man, and man's elements and life, can render the highest service only when accepted as an entirety, not in the spirit of carping criticism, but in the spirit in which they were created.

But the prevailing moral tastes, like the intellectual, show themselves in the false interpretations that have been placed upon his illustrations of this theory, especially of the collection of short poems called *Children of Adam*, in which the author celebrates his sex, and speaks in the interest of the amative part of the human physiology.

A glance at this portion of his book suffices to show that its author has not imitated the licentious poets at all, but that his method is akin to the Biblical writers, who have treated these things with candor and pure-mindedness, implying the sanctity of sex, and using it as a type in a higher and more spiritual language. Of the morbid, venereal, euphemistic, gentlemanly, club-house lust, which, under thin disguises, is in every novel and most of the poetry of our times, he has not the first word or thought—not the faintest whisper. What he has, he has; and it is Adam, fresh, full, rose-colored, walking in the garden in primal health and warmth, and sweet as the dews:

"Ages and ages, returning at intervals,
Undestroy'd, wandering immortal,
Lusty, phallic, with the potent original loins, perfectly sweet,
I, chanter of Adamic songs,
Through the new garden, the West, the great cities calling,
Deliriate, thus prelude what is generated, offering these, offering myself,
Bathing myself, bathing my songs in Sex,
Offspring of my loins."

The sexual acts and feelings, he chants mainly with reference to offspring, and the future perfection of the race, through a superior fatherhood and motherhood. His treatment of woman is as far from levity as from coarseness. He sees her in her universal human relations as the "teeming mother of mothers," and recognizes that upon the health of her body, the development of her powers, and the normal exercise of her maternal functions, all the future of the race depends:

"Be not ashamed, women—your privilege encloses the rest, and is the exit of the rest,
You are the gates of the body, and you are the gates of the soul.

The female contains all qualities, and tempers them—she is in her place, and moves with perfect balance;
She is all things duly veil'd—she is both passive and active;
She is to conceive daughters as well as sons, and sons as well as daughters.

As I see my soul reflected in nature;
As I see through a mist, one with inexpressible completeness and beauty,
See the bent head, and arms folded over the breast—the female I see."

His allusions and instances to the amative act are strong, but always perfectly healthy:

"The hairy wild-bee that murmurs and hankers up and down—that gripes the full-grown lady-flower, curves upon her with amorous firm legs, takes his will of her, and holds himself tremulous and tight till he is satisfied."

And, concluding another passage:

"Bridegroom night of love, working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn;
Undulating into the willing and yielding day,
Lost in the cleave of the clasping and sweet-flesh'd day."

The poet has charged himself, as he passes on, to make full acknowledgment, for once or twice at least, to the animal amative in man, which is the basis of all there is of good and divine in him; and he scornfully rejects the puerile creed that would put apart sex, and what arises from it, in humanity, as a forbidden and shameful topic, unworthy poetic treatment. His position toward the moral and æsthetic qualities, rising out of this question, is proportionately serious; though he has refrained from unduly exalting any part or endowment.

In these brief Notes I cannot elaborate, though a volume ought to be written on this point. I can but say that in the furiously assaulted pieces now under notice, Walt Whitman, in my opinion, has best won his laurels, his fadeless future bardic crown. Not by the temporary or common judgment must these pieces be judged. Offensive to the vulgar, to the merely conventional, to him or her who weakly joins the prevailing delusion of the inherent vileness of sex, and, above all, to the constitutionally lecherous, who think of but one purpose in sex, and attempt to hide their own rank nature by extra verbal vociferousness in such questions;—yet the high and clear soul will ever welcome these pieces with applauding joy, as Nature's, and, (if one may say so,) God's own celebration of amativeness and defence of sex.

To the noblest male or female, there is no more reason for excluding sex, and what belongs to it, from the works and treatment of the poet, than there would be to exclude it from the works of the surgeon or physician.

XII.

There is in LEAVES OF GRASS none of the customary sentimental adulation of the "softer sex"—none of that fulsome flattery and low-bowing deference which inflates the gallant poetry of the day; but it is the first grand scheme of life anywhere, according to my knowledge, that proceeds upon, and inculcates, the perfect equality of the sexes. "The woman the same as the man" our poet is never tired of repeating. How I love to dwell upon this picture of the typical woman of his poems:

"Her shape arises,
She, less guarded than ever, yet more guarded than ever;
The gross and soil'd she moves among do not make her gross and soil'd;
She knows the thoughts as she passes—nothing is conceal'd from her;
She is none the less considerate or friendly therefor;
She is the best-beloved—it is without exception—she has no reason to fear, and she does not fear;
Oaths, quarrels, hiccupp'd songs, smutty expressions, are idle to her as she passes;
She is silent—she is possess'd of herself—they do not offend her;
She receives them as the laws of nature receive them—she is strong,
She too is a law of nature—there is no law stronger than she is."

XIII.

The human body, in this portion of the book, and often elsewhere throughout its pages, receives indeed a treatment which may well strike society with wonder, and which, from the conventions of the day, it is not easy to penetrate or comprehend.

The poet seems to gaze in a mood of awe and worship upon the mere material human body, either male or female, and all its functions. Nothing is more intoxicating, nothing

more sacred than the Body; he often capitalizes the word, as is done with the name of the Deity. Far different from the world's acceptance of it, is his acceptance. Far from avoiding it, to dwell upon the Body, to sing of it, seems to imbue him with a devout ecstacy and passion.

The purity of the Body in its juices and vascular and vital attributes, and all its organs, is, in fact, one of the lessons, if not the chief lesson of the book. To the young, or to any, its atmosphere in this respect is invaluable. One who has the volume for a daily companion will be under a constant invisible influence toward physiological cleanliness, strength, and gradual severance from all that corrupts and makes morbid and mean.

XIV.

Children of Adam is beautifully rounded off and finished by a collection of poems called *Calamus*, celebrating manly friendship and the need of comrades. These pieces, the poet declares, "expose him more than all his other poems." The sentiment here is primitive, athletic, taking form in all manner of large and homely out-door images, and springs, as any one may see, directly from the heart and experience of the poet. It has, too, a political significance. Not paper agreement or force of arms is to perpetuate the Union and make the continent indissoluble, but love of man for man, of friend for friend:

"What think you I take my pen in hand to record?
The battle-ship, perfect-model'd, majestic, that I saw pass the offing to-day under full sail?
The splendors of the past day? Or the splendor of the night that envelops me?

Or the vaunted glory and growth of the great city spread around me?—
No;
But I record of two simple men I saw to-day, on the pier, in the midst
of the crowd, parting the parting of dear friends;
The one to remain hung on the other's neck, and passionately kiss'd him,
While the one to depart tightly prest the one to remain in his arms."

Then this quaint touch:

"I hear it was charged against me that I sought to destroy institutions;
But really I am neither for nor against institutions;
(What indeed have I in common with them?—Or what with the
destruction of them?)
Only I will establish in the Mannahatta, and in every city of These
States, inland and seaboard,
And in the fields and woods, and above every keel, little or large, that
dents the water,
Without edifices, or rules, or trustees, or any argument,
The institution of the dear love of comrades."

XV.

The pieces of the volume, though numerous, and both large and small, fall, in time, into identity, and become one poem, which finds its generic type in a human being. The writer says *To a Historian:*

"You who celebrate bygones!
Who have explored the outward, the surfaces of the races—the life that
has exhibited itself;
Who have treated of man as the creature of politics, aggregates, rulers
and priests;
I, habitue of the Alleghanies, treating man as he is in himself, in his
own rights,
Pressing the pulse of the life that has seldom exhibited itself, (the great
pride of man in himself;)
Chanter of personality, outlining what is yet to be, I project the history
of the future."

The charge of want of unity of aim, or wholeness, brought against the earlier editions, will not hold against the completed work, lit up by the *Inscription*. To put it in a sentence, the object of the author is to outline a New Man, whom he regards as typical of the American of the future, and of whom he perpetually uses himself as the illustration. This character he has mapped out in bold, strong lines, and in its interest has written his poems. Of course the idea is followed with the greatest freedom, and appears best when the pieces are taken together, and viewed at a little remove as it were.

XVI.

The Nationality of the book seems to me perfect. Its treatment and consideration of the States of this Union as so many equal brothers, of exactly average right and position, each the peer of the other, is of the greatest value. No statement, or code of law, can ever present this principle to the impressive degree in which LEAVES OF GRASS presents it. It becomes a central palpable fact, too certain to need argument, as life is.

But not the States alone; it expands from them, and includes the world. Out of it, in these poems, flow countless analogies, illustrations, and noble lines, connecting an American citizen with the citizens of all nations:

"Each of us inevitable;
Each of us limitless—each of us with his or her right upon the earth;
Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of the earth;
Each of us here as divinely as any is here."

The book has indeed such good will on the widest scale, and places the United States in such an attitude of tolera-

tion and amicableness. The globe is large enough for us all. There are far more points of resemblance between distant nations than points of opposition. (See *Salut au Monde*, *This Moment Yearning and Thoughtful*, etc.)

XVII.

A profound claim, launched into the moral and æsthetic fields, the same as the claim of equality in the political field, has of late years been pressed from many quarters, and has gained lodgement in most leading modern minds, although not yet practically recognized at all in the forms of literature, or perhaps in any of the forms. It is the claim, or idea, that any and every individual, no matter what his occupation, farm laborer, common workman, sailor, etc., has open to him his equal lot and chance for physical, moral, and graceful development, with the choicest of the selecter few; that, still retaining his occupation, he may be of largest soul and personality.

Of what is contained in this idea, LEAVES OF GRASS is the poem. Upon the assumption of this claim as one settled and unimpeachable, the work is built.

XVIII.

Satire—has Walt Whitman that talent? Does he wield the branding iron? Read *To Get Betimes in Boston Town*. Read *Respondez*. The mocking of devils is less caustic than the last-named piece. He holds at times a stern, warning, rebuking tone, peculiar to himself, as in the *Hand Mirror*, *This Compost*, and the bitter lines *To Identify the 16th, 17th, and 18th Presidentiads*.

Then of Imagination, Correspondence;—I doubt whether

for their purposes the English language affords a finer specimen of verbal structure than the *Leaf of Faces*. A German scholar and traveler has described this piece as being both Darwinian and Dantesque. I quote only its first section:

"Sauntering the pavement, or riding the country by-road—lo! such faces!
Faces of friendship, precision, caution, suavity, ideality;
The spiritual prescient face—the always welcome, common, benevolent face,
The face of the singing of music—the grand faces of natural lawyers and judges, broad at the back-top;
The faces of hunters and fishers, bulged at the brows—the shaved blanch'd faces of orthodox citizens;
The pure, extravagant, yearning, questioning artist's face;
The ugly face of some beautiful Soul, the handsome detested or despised face;
The sacred faces of infants, the illuminated face of the mother of many children;
The face of an amour, the face of veneration;
The face as of a dream, the face of an immobile rock;
The face withdrawn of its good and bad, a castrated face;
A wild hawk, his wings clipped by the clipper;
A stallion that yielded at last to the thongs and knife of the gelder."

XIX.

Every now and then along the book, as we travel its paths, we get a whiff of something that culture, be it the best in the world, never alone could give. It is like the smell of wild sage and thyme in the pure air of the high plateaus far west. He turns pensively away from all the profits, luxuries, and irksome ease of the cities.

"O it lurks in me night and day—what is gain after all to savageness and freedom?"

xx.

Finally, I love LEAVES OF GRASS for its cheerful good faith, and because to its pages the cursed, finical, self-complacent smartness of our age has not entered, and does not once stain with its brilliant and bitter poison a single line there. The characteristic of prevailing literature is to make fun of everything. Our writers are perpetually engaged in turning character and humanity around and around, to discover something ridiculous and to point out defects, and are always generating and giving out productions from a supercilious point of view. Amid them comes this work, like a visitant from another and a distant clime. On its forehead BELIEF is stamped; and, fortified with complete science, its firm and mellow voice again speaks as from that atmosphere of far-back time when God descended and walked as a brother among men.

Out of such atmosphere, and with such primal and universal ties, up springs this structure, sheaf-like, enigmatic, various, yet one; and as we gaze and gaze, and wish the unlocking word, gradually the dimness and the many-tinted, many-twining lines become illumined, definite, showing clearly the word—MODERNNESS.

LEAVES OF GRASS.

STANDARD OF THE NATURAL UNIVERSAL.

XXI.

WHAT is the reason that the inexorable and perhaps deciding standard by which poems, and other productions of art, must be tried, after the application of all minor tests, is the standard of absolute Nature? The question can hardly be answered, but the answer may be hinted at. The standard of form, for instance, is presented by Nature, out of the prevailing shapes of her growths, and appears to perfection in the human body. All the forms in art, sculpture, architecture, etc., follow it. Of course the same in colors; and, in fact, the same even in music, though more human and carried higher.

But a nearer hint still. The same moral elements and qualities that exist in man in a conscious state, exist, says the great German philosopher, in manifold material Nature, and all her products, in an unconscious state. Powerful and susceptible men—in other words, poets, naturally so—have an affiliation and identity with the material Nature in its entirety and parts, that the majority of people (including most specially intellectual persons) cannot begin to under-

stand; so passionate is it, and so convertible seems to be the essence of the demonstrative human spirit, with the undemonstrative spirit of the hill and wood, the river, field, and sky.

I know that, at first sight, certain works of art, in some branches, do not exhibit this identity and convertibility. But it needs only a little trouble and thought to trace them. I assert that every true work of art has arisen, primarily, out of its maker, apart from his talent of manipulation, being filled fuller than other men with this passionate affiliation and identity with Nature. Then I go a step further, and, without being an artist myself, I feel that every good artist of any age would join me in subordinating the most vaunted beauties of the best artificial productions, to the daily and hourly beauty of the shows and objects of outward Nature. I mean inclusively, the objects of Nature in their human relations.

To him that is pregnable, the rocks, the hills, the evening, the grassy bank, the young trees and old trees, the various subtle dynamic forces, the sky, the seasons, the birds, the domestic animals, etc., furnish intimate and precious relations at first hand, which nothing at second hand can supply. Their spirit affords to man's spirit, I sometimes think, its only inlet to clear views of the highest Philosophy and Religion. Only in their spirit can he himself have health, sweetness, and proportion; and only in their spirit can he give any essentially sound judgment of a poem, no matter what the subject of it may be.

But it seems to me that the spirit or influence I allude to is, in our age, entirely lacking, either as an inspirer, or any part of the inspiration of poems, or as a part of the critical

faculty which judges them, or judges of any work of art. We have swarms of little poetlings, producing swarms of soft and sickly little rhymelets, on a par with the feeble calibre and vague and puerile inward melancholy, and outward affectation and small talk, of that genteel mob called "society." We have, also, more or less of statues and statuettes, and plenty of architecture and upholstery, and filagree work, very pretty and ornamental, and fit for those who are fit for it. But anything, in any of these fields, contributed at first hand, in the spirit I have spoken of, or able to give tonic and elevating results to the people, we certainly have not. Who thinks of it? Who comes forward capable of producing it? Who even realizes the necessity of producing it?

XXII.

The whole stress of Walt Whitman is the supply of what is wanted in this direction. He possesses almost to excess the quality in which our imaginative writers and artists are all and each of them barren. The inspiration of the facts *per se* of the human body, and of rude abysmal man, are upon him; and he speaks out of them without being diverted a moment by the current conventions, or any inquiry as to what is the literary mode, or what the public taste.

He says plainly enough: I do not wish to speak from the atmosphere of books, or art, or the parlor; nor in the interest of the elegant and conventional modes. I pitch my voice in the open air.

"Not for an embroiderer;
(There will always be plenty of embroiderers—I welcome them also;)
But for the fibre of things, and for inherent men and women.

Not to chisel ornaments,
But to chisel with free stroke the heads and limbs of plenteous Supreme Gods, that The States may realize them, walking and talking."

XXIII.

Who is the great poet, and where the perfect poem? Nature itself is the only perfect poem, and the Kosmos is the only great poet. The Kosmos:

"Who includes diversity, and is Nature,
Who is the amplitude of the earth, and the coarseness and sexuality of the earth, and the great charity of the earth, and the equilibrium also,
Who has not look'd forth from the windows, the eyes, for nothing, or whose brain held audience with messengers for nothing;
Who contains believers and disbelievers—Who is the most majestic lover;
Who holds duly his or her triune proportion of realism, spiritualism, and of the æsthetic, or intellectual,
Who, having consider'd the Body, finds all its organs and parts good;
Who, out of the theory of the earth, and of his or her body, understands by subtle analogies all other theories,
The theory of a city, a poem, and of the large politics of These States."

The image Walt Whitman seems generally to have in his mind is that of the Earth, "round, rolling, compact," and he aims to produce effects analagous to those produced by it; to address the mind as the landscape or the mountains, or ideas of space or time, address it; not to excite admiration by fine and minute effects, but to feed the mind by exhibitions of power; to make demands upon it, like those made by Nature; to give it the grasp and wholesomeness which come from contact with realities; to vitalize it by bringing to bear upon it material forms, and the width of

the globe, as the atmosphere bears upon the blood through the lungs; working always by indirections, and depending on a correspondsive working of the mind that reads or hears, with the mind that produces, as the female with the male; careless of mere art, yet loyally achieving the effects of highest art; not unmindful of details, yet subordinating everything to the total effect.

XXIV.

Yet no modern book of poems says so little about Nature, or contains so few compliments to her. Its subject, from beginning to end, is MAN, and whatever pertains to or grows out of him; the facts of mechanics, the life of cities and farms, and the various trades and occupations. What I describe, therefore, must be sought in its interior. The poet is not merely an observer of Nature, but is immersed in her, and from thence turns his gaze upon people, upon the age, and upon America. Heretofore, we have had Nature talked of and discussed; these poems approximate to a direct utterance of Nature herself.

From this comes, in a sense, the male principle of the book, which gives that erect, proud, aggressive, forenoon character, the opposite of dallying, or sentimentalism, or poetic sweetness, or reclining at ease—but which tallies a man's rude health and strength, and goes forward with sinewy life and action. From the same source also comes that quality of the book which makes it, on the surface, almost as little literary or recondite as the rocks and the trees are, or as a spring morning is. Yet a careful analysis shows that the author has certainly wrought with all the resources of literary composition at command. In the

same degree that the book is great in a primordial, aboriginal sense, is it great in a Gœthean, Emersonian literary sense. It touches and includes both extremes; not only is the bottom here, but the top also; not only all that science can give, but more besides. No doubt this fact greatly misled the critics, who failed to discriminate between mere wildness and savagery, as waiting for science and culture, and that vital sympathy with Nature, and freedom from conventional literary restraint, which comes only with the fullest science and culture, and which is one of the distinguishing features of our author.

Of the current condition of criticism in this country, the future literary historian will need no more painful or decisive proof than the fact that a production like Leaves of Grass could pass as merely a crude and awkward attempt at poetry, by an unlettered man, perhaps a common laborer, who, (it was graciously admitted,) with the advantages or "culture" and "good society," might have made sleek little rhymes, like his contemporaries. I know the common rule that aspirants to literary fame must be measured by the standards of art and literature in vogue at the time. But when a man comes who justifies new standards and principles, the question then is, not whether he can stand the tests of the academy, but whether the academy can stand his tests.

xxv.

He gives not so much thought, as the stuff of which thought is made. "I finish no specimens," he says; "What others give as specimens, I show by exhaustless laws, as Nature does, fresh and modern continually." Indeed he seems careful to avoid making a clean intellectual statement

of a principle, or of shining in the scholastic manner at all. He no sooner starts a principle than he surrounds it and clothes it with a living texture of things and doings, redeeming it from all appearance of an abstraction, and giving it a palpable flesh-and-blood reality; so that the effect upon the mind is not the effect of gems or crystals, or their analogues in poetry, but of living organisms. Take the poem or which the following is the opening:

"There was a child went forth every day;
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became;
And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of the day, or for many years, or stretching cycles of years.

The early lilacs became part of this child,
And grass, and white and red morning-glories, and white and red clover, and the song of the phœbe-bird,
And the Third-month lambs, and the sow's pink-faint litter, and the mare's foal, and the cow's calf,
And the noisy brood of the barn-yard, or by the mire of the pond-side,
And the fish suspending themselves so curiously below there—and the beautiful curious liquid,
And the water-plants with their graceful flat heads—all became part of him."

This passage contains a philosophical and psychological principle; yet it is not stated or precipitated at all, but held in liquid solution.

The poet, like Nature, seems best pleased when his meaning is well folded up, put away, and surrounded by a curious array of diverting attributes and objects. Perhaps the point may be conveyed by the term elliptical. A word or brief phrase is often, or usually, put for a full picture or idea, or train of ideas or pictures. But the word or phrase

is always an electric one. He never stops to elaborate, never explains.

Does it seem as if I praised him for making riddles? That is not it; he does not make riddles, or anything like them. He is very subtle, very indirect, and very rapid, and if the reader is not fully awake will surely elude him. Take this passage from the poem *Walt Whitman:*

"Of the turbid pool that lies in the autumn forest,
Of the moon that descends the steeps of the soughing twilight,
Toss, sparkles of day and dusk! toss on the black stems that decay in the muck!
Toss to the moaning gibberish of the dry limbs.

I ascend from the moon, I ascend from the night;
I perceive that the ghastly glimmer is noonday sunbeams reflected;
And debouch to the steady and central from the offspring great or small."

A picture of Death and a hint of immortality, and that the shows of things never stop at what they seem to the sight. The pale and ghastly glimmer of the moon in the midnight pool is, when viewed truly, the light of the ever-glorious sun.

XXVI.

Then further as to the question of finish or definite aim. To me the book is much like pure arterial blood. No other poems afford a parallel in this respect. Out of its very nature arises the objection from certain quarters that it has no distinct purpose or aim, and therefore has no artistic completion. It certainly has not the finish of a tale, romance, or any plot, which begins, goes on, and closes; neither has it the special purpose of a partisan book, or of a religious, scientific or philosophical treatise; but it has

purpose again just as Nature has; to nourish, to strengthen, to fortify, to tantalize, to provoke curiosity, to hint, to suggest, to lead on and on, and never stop and never satisfy. Its final end is power; it walls no man in, but opens up to him endless prospects into space and the verities of the soul. The author himself says that his poems are not so much a good lesson, as that they take down the bars to a good lesson:

> ———"they are not the finish, but rather the outset;
> They bring none to his or her terminus, or to be contented and full;
> Whom they take, they take into space, to behold the birth of stars, to behold one of the meanings,
> To launch off with absolute faith—to sweep through the ceaseless rings, and never be quiet again."

The brilliant epigrammatist will surely find the book an offence, and will battle against it; because the poetry of Walt Whitman is, in a certain sort, death to epigrams, and is either the large poetry of the Whole, of Science, and of God, or it is nothing.

The profit of the book is largely in what it infers and necessitates. Like the bibles of nations, it is not so much what it gives in itself, as what it certainly gives birth to—a long train of revelations, new opinions, beliefs and institutions.

The highest art is not to express art, but to express life and communicate power. Let those persons who have been so fast to criticise Leaves of Grass in this respect reflect if Nature be not open to the same objections, and if the living figure be not less than the marble statue, because it does not stimulate the art faculty. Both readers and writers need to be told that a poet may propose to himself

higher ends than lace or needlework. Modern verse does not express the great liberating power of Art, but only its conventional limitations, and the elegant finish of details to which society runs. It never once ceases to appeal directly to that part of the mind which is cognizant of mere form—form denoted by regular lines. It is never so bold as music, which in the analysis is discord, but in the synthesis harmony; and falls far short of painting, which puts in masses of subdued color to one brilliant point, and which is forever escaping out of mere form into vista.

To accuse Walt Whitman, therefore, of want of art, is to overlook his generic quality, and shows ignorance of the ends for which Nature and Time exist to the mind. He has the art which surrounds all art, as the sphere holds all form. He works, it may be said, after the pure method of Nature, and nothing less; and includes not only the artist of the beautiful, but forestalls the preacher and the moralist by his synthesis and kosmical integrity.

XXVII.

Dating mainly from Wordsworth and his school, there is in modern literature, and especially in current poetry, a great deal of what is technically called Nature. Indeed it might seem that this subject was worn threadbare long ago, and that something else was needed. The word Nature, now, to most readers, suggests only some flower bank, or summer cloud, or pretty scene that appeals to the sentiments. None of this is in Walt Whitman. And it is because he corrects this false, artificial Nature, and shows me the real article, that I hail his appearance as the most important literary event of our times.

Wordsworth was truly a devout and loving observer of Nature, and perhaps has indicated more surely than any other poet the healthful moral influence of the milder aspects of rural scenery. But to have spoken in the full spirit of the least fact which he describes would have rent him to atoms. To have accepted Nature in her entirety, as the absolutely good and the absolutely beautiful, would have been to him tantamount to moral and intellectual destruction. He is simply a rural and metaphysical poet whose subjects are drawn mostly from Nature, instead of from society, or the domain of romance; and he tells in so many words what he sees and feels in the presence of natural objects. He has definite aim, like a preacher or moralist as he was, and his effects are nearer akin to those of pretty vases and parlor ornaments than to trees or hills.

In Nature everything is held in solution; there are no discriminations, or failures, or ends; there is no poetry or philosophy—but there is that which is better, and which feeds the soul, diffusing itself through the mind in calm and equable showers. To give the analogy of this in the least degree was not the success of Wordsworth. Neither has it been the success of any of the so-called poets of Nature since his time. Admirable as many of these poets are in some respects, they are but visiting-card callers upon Nature, going to her for tropes and figures only. In the products of the lesser fry of them I recognize merely a small toying with Nature—a kind of sentimental flirtation with birds and butterflies.

I am aware, also, that the Germanic literary "storm and stress periods," during the latter part of the last century, screamed vehemently for "Nature" too; but they knew

not what they said. The applauded works of that period and place were far from the spirit of Nature, which is health, not disease.

XXVIII.

If it appears that I am devoting my pages to the exclusive consideration of literature from the point of view of Nature and the spirit of Nature, it is not because I am unaware of other and very important standards and points of view. But these others, at the present day, need no urging, nor even a statement from me. Their claims are not only acknowledged—they tyrannize out of all proportion. The standards of Nature apply just as much to what is called artificial life, all that belongs to cities and to modern manufactures and machinery, and the life arising out of them. Walt Whitman's poems, though entirely gathered, as it were, under the banner of the Natural Universal, include, for themes, as has been already stated, all modern artificial combinations, and the facts of machinery, trades, &c. These are an essential part of his chants. It is, indeed, all the more indispensable to resume and apply to these, the genuine standards.

Our civilization is not an escape from Nature, but a mastery over, and following out of, Nature. We do not keep the air and the sunlight out of our houses, but only the rain and the cold; and the untamed and unrefined elements of the earth are just as truly the sources of our health and strength as they are of the savages'. In speaking of Walt Whitman's poetry, I do not mean raw, unreclaimed Nature. I mean the human absorption of Nature like the earths in fruit and grain, or in the animal economy. The

dominant facts of his poetry, carried out strictly and invariably from these principles, are Life, Love, and the Immortal Identity of the Soul. Here he culminates, and here are the regions where, in all his themes, after treating them, he finally ascends with them, soaring high and cleaving the heavens.

LEAVES OF GRASS.

BEAUTY.

XXIX.

Is beauty ornament, or is it an inherency? Is it an outside addition and polish, or does it reside in the fibre and quality of things themselves? Would our search for beauty lead us to regard only the brilliancies, the flowers, the accordant sounds, the reflections in the pond? or have the rocks and the weeds a part to play also?

In ancient mythology, beauty is represented as riding on the back of a lion; meaning, probably, that beauty cannot be enjoyed alone—cannot be separated from power or even savage necessity. In short, that it is linked with its opposite. This is the invariable order of Nature.

It comes to me, that there is something implied or understood when we look upon a beautiful object, that has quite as much to do with the impression made upon the mind as anything in the object itself; perhaps more. There is somehow an immense and undefined background of vast and unconscionable energy, as of earthquakes, and ocean storms, and cleft mountains, across which things of beauty play, and to which they constantly defer; and when this back-

ground is wanting, as it is in most current poetry, beauty sickens and dies, or at most has only a feeble existence.

Nature does nothing merely for beauty; beauty follows as the inevitable result; and the impression of total health and finish which her works make upon the mind is owing as much to those things which are not technically called beautiful, as to those which are. The former give identity to the latter. The one is to the other what substance is to form, or bone to flesh. The beauty of Nature includes all that is called beautiful, as its flower; and all that is not called beautiful, as its stalk and roots.

Indeed when I go to the woods or fields, or ascend to the hill-top, I do not seem to be gazing upon beauty at all, but to be breathing it like the air. I am not dazzled or astonished; I am in no hurry to look, lest it be gone. I would not have the litter and debris removed, or the banks trimmed, or the ground painted. What I enjoy is commensurate with the earth and sky itself. It clings to the rocks and trees; it is kindred to the roughness and savagery; it lurks in every tangle and chasm; it perches on the dry oak stubbs; the fox and the coon give it out as they pass; the crows caw it, and weave it into their nests of coarse sticks; the cattle low it, and every mountain path leads to its haunts. I am not a spectator of, but a participator in it. It becomes as the iron and lime and oxygen in my blood and bones. It is not an adornment; its roots strike to the centre of the earth.

XXX.

After fullest experience, one surely comes to feel that art, as such, is death; and that only that invigorates which leaves an office to be performed by the eye that sees. Such

alone stimulates desire, and blends with the mind. The commonest and the nearest are at last the most acceptable. The old chamber without ceiling or plaster, the litter of out-houses, the hut in the woods, the rustic bridge, the farmer with his team, or foddering his cattle from a stack upon the new snow—one feels that it is from such that he himself came, and from such, after all due acknowledgments to books and to civilization have been made, that he still draws the breath of life.

"I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'œuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,
And the cow crunching with deprest head surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels,
And I could come every afternoon of my life to look at the farmer's girl boiling her iron tea-kettle and baking short-cake."

XXXI.

It must be ever present to the true artist in his attempt to report Nature, that every object as it stands in the sequence of cause and effect has a history which involves its surroundings, and that the depth of the interest which it awakens in us is in proportion as its integrity in this respect is preserved. In Nature we are prepared for any opulence of color, or vegetation, or freak of form, or display of any kind, by the preponderance of the common, ever-present features of the earth. I never knew how beautiful a red-bird was till I saw one darting through the recesses of a shaggy old hemlock wood. In like manner the bird of the naturalist can

never interest us like the thrush the farm boy heard singing in the cedars at twilight as he drove the cows to pasture, or like the swallow that flew gleefully in the air above him as he picked the stones from the early May meadow.

XXXII.

The current poetry of the day is an attempt to give us beauty without the lion. It aims at great surface charm—possesses the merit of form, of color, of jewels, of perfume—but has none of the charm of power and aboriginal might, or the charm shown by the best Greek and oldest Asiatic bards, which is above all color and sparkle, and upon which these things wait as willing slaves. It proceeds on the theory that beauty is a dainty discriminate, something to be arrived at by a sifting, clarifying process; that it is quite accidental, residing in certain things and not in others; that it is entirely distinct from use and economy, and is peculiarly the province of poetry, being achieved here by a lucky combination of sweet, picked words and tropes, etc. Hence, on opening a book of modern poetry, one feels like exclaiming, Well, here is the beautiful at last, divested of everything else—of truth, of power, of economy; and one may add, of beauty too.

"Labor for labor's sake," says Locke, "is against nature;" and beauty sought directly as beauty is the spinal weakness of modern verse. Because some objects are, to girls and young men, more obviously beautiful than others, and attract common beholders, the mind which has not yet opened to the perception of law—of that which makes beautiful—jumps to the conclusion that beauty has an objective existence, and that to collect together those objects of Nature

that first awaken the sentiment, and string them on some thread of romance, or delicate thought, is the secret of making beautiful poems!

Woe to that poet, musician, or any artist, who disengages beauty from the wide background of rudeness, darkness, and strength—and disengages her from absolute Nature! The mild and beneficent aspects of Nature—what gulfs and abysses of power underlie them! The great, ugly, barbaric earth—yet the summing up, the plenum of all we know, or can know, of beauty! So the orbic poems of the world have a foundation as of the earth itself, and are beautiful because they are something else first. Homer chose for his groundwork War, clinching, tearing, tugging war; in Dante it is Hell; in Milton, Satan and the Fall; in Shakspeare it is pride and diabolic passion. What is it in Tennyson? Soft aristocratic ennui and luxury, and love-sick sentiment. The dainty poets, "the eye singers, ear singers, love singers," have not the courage, the stamina, to accept the gross in Nature or life; that which is the basis of all else. Only the great masters accept all. It is this which gives genesis to their works.

XXXIII.

Do I say, then, that beauty is not the object or attribute of Leaves of Grass? Not directly the object, but indirectly. The love of eternal beauty and of truth move the author to his work, producing a poem without a single piece of embroidery or hung-on ornament, yet in its quality and proportion dominating, in this very attribute, all rivals.

It is on the clear eye, the firm and limber step, the sweet breath, the loving lip, the magnetism of sex, the

lofty and religious soul, eloquent in figure as in face, that Walt Whitman has depended for beauty's attractiveness in his poems.

He is by no means insensible to what is called the poetic aspect of things; only he uses this element sparingly; and well seasoned with the salt of the earth. Where others bring a flower from the woods or a shell from the shore, he brings the woods and the shore also, so that his charm lies in the completed integrity of his statements.

Of a long account of a battle which I once read in some old Grecian history I remember only the fact, casually mentioned by the historian, that the whereabouts of one army was betrayed to the other by the glint of the moon-light upon the shield of a soldier as he stood on a high hill. The touches in LEAVES OF GRASS are of like significance, and by their singleness and peculiarity not one is lost to the mind.

But this is not the final statement. That which in every instance has been counted the defect of Walt Whitman's writings, namely, that they are not markedly poetical, as that term is used, constitutes their transcendent merit. Unlike all others, this poet's words seem dressed for work, with hands and arms bare. At first sight they appear as careless of mere beauty, or mere art, as do the leaves of the forest about numbers, or the snow-flakes as to where they shall fall; yet his poems do more to the mind, for this very reason, than the most ostentatiously elaborated works. They indicate fresh and near at hand the exhaustless sources of beauty and art. Comparatively few minds are impressed with the organic beauty of the world. That there are gleams and touches here and there which not only have no refer-

ence "to the compact truth of the whole," but which are lucky exceptions to the general rule, and which it is the province of art to fix and perpetuate in color or form, is the notion of all our poets and poetlings. Outside of LEAVES OF GRASS there is no theory or practice in modern letters that keeps in view the principle after which the highest artists, like Michael Angelo, have wrought, namely, that in the unimpeachable health and rectitude and latent power of the world are to be found the true sources of beauty for purposes of Art.

The perception of such high, kosmical beauty comes by a vital original process of the mind. It is in some measure a creative act, and those works that rest upon it make demands—perhaps extraordinary demands—upon the reader or beholder. We regard mere surface glitter, or mere verbal sweetness, in a mood entirely passive, and with a pleasure entirely profitless. The beauty of excellent stage scenery seems much more obvious and easy of apprehension than the beauty of the trees und hills themselves, inasmuch as the act of association in the mind is easier and inferior to the act of original perception.

Only the greatest works in any department afford any explanation of this wonder we call Nature, or aid the mind in arriving at correct notions concerning it. To copy here and there a line or a tint is no explanation; but to translate Nature into another language—to repeat, in some sort, the act of creation itself—as is done in LEAVES OF GRASS, is the final and crowning triumph of poetic art.

LEAVES OF GRASS.

PERSONALITY . . . THE WESTERN BARD.

XXXIV.

IT has been mournfully complained that specimens of men equal to the towering and gigantic Personalities of ancient days, before the advent of general science and modern inventions, no more exist among us. Walt Whitman's aim evidently is to produce Personalities not merely as full as those of the primitive times, but which will have, in addition, all that the long train of knowledge, science, inventions and commerce, have accumulated since, and which will also be perfectly adapted to modern social and municipal purposes.

LEAVES OF GRASS, in fact, proceed upon the theory that, whether she knows it or not, America has staked her success upon the excellence of the average individual, and that the thing she needs to cultivate and to value above all other values is a strong and fully-equipped Personality. Culture, social conventions, luxuries, the multiplication of appliances for making people comfortable and easy, and for rendering feet and hands superfluous, tend to break up and diffuse

capacity, and lead to decay in the qualities of rude endurance and grand primary idiosyncracies. Hence this poem, bringing what we most need, is flooded and charged with all the valor, spirit, and wholesomeness begotten by the hardier occupations.

Indeed I doubt if the literature of any nation has a book that confronts the reader with a personality so pervasive and full as that in LEAVES OF GRASS. It becomes more and more apparent as we peruse its pages, that this is the enclosing purport of all. It is himself finally in the integrity of his entire Being, that the author gives us. Books heretofore that have aspired to the expression of great truths have been more intellectual than Nature will bear—have expressed that which makes the scholar, the thinker, the artist, the priest, etc., divorced from that which makes the Man—so that the works of all old and highly-civilized nations are usually a collection of theories or systems or metaphysical speculations, and for any vital characteristic touches, we are obliged to go back to their early ballads, before the advent of science and general knowledge. Now LEAVES OF GRASS expresses the intellect, but it does not stop here; it goes as high as the highest; then it expresses what none other does, the body, sex, health, personal magnetism; in short the vital physiological fusion and knitting together of all the elements that make a fully endowed personality. It is perfectly true that to the careless observer it seems to fall below the standard of the polite and learned authors, by expressing not the scholar or the artist or the professional *litterateur* merely, but the veritable Adamic Man as he stands immersed in realities, and as he goes forth to conquer and populate and possess the earth.

"This is the poem of occupations;
In the labor of engines and trades, and the labor of fields, I find the developments,
And find the eternal meanings.

Workmen and workwomen!
Were all educations, practical and ornamental, well displayed out of me, what would it amount to?
Were I as the head teacher, charitable proprietor, wise statesman, what would it amount to?
Were I to you as the boss employing and paying you, would that satisfy you?

The learn'd, virtuous, benevolent, and the usual terms;
A man like me, and never the usual terms.

Neither a servant nor a master am I;
I take no sooner a large price than a small price—I will have my own, whoever enjoys me;
I will be even with you, and you shall be even with me."

It is, of course, never the conventional man of to-day for whom he speaks. He has rejected the conventional man of to-day as effete; has ignored his ennuyed and foppish modes, and sowed broadcast a "new gladness and roughness." How the following passages contrast with the confectionery of the popular poets:

"O lands! would you be freer than all that has ever been before?
If you would be freer than all that has been before, come listen to me.

Fear grace—Fear delicatesse!
Fear the mellow sweet, the sucking of honey-juice;
Beware the advancing mortal ripening of nature!
Beware what precedes the decay of the ruggedness of states and men."

And in the like strain:

"Listen! I will be honest with you;
I do not offer the old smooth prizes, but offer rough new prizes;
These are the days that must happen to you:

You shall not heap up what is called riches,
You shall scatter with lavish hand all that you earn or achieve,
You but arrive at the city to which you were destined—you hardly settle yourself to satisfaction, before you are call'd by an irresistible call to depart;
You shall be treated to the ironical smiles and mockings of those who remain behind you;
What beckonings of love you receive, you shall only answer with passionate kisses of parting,
You shall not allow the hold of those who spread their reach'd hands toward you."

And in another place:

"Long enough have you dream'd contemptible dreams;
Now I wash the gum from your eyes;
You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light, and of every moment of your life.

Long have you timidly waded, holding a plank by the shore;
Now I will you to be a bold swimmer,
To jump off in the midst of the sea, rise again, nod to me, shout, and laughingly dash with your hair."

And, after a different figure:

"I tramp a perpetual journey—(come listen all!)
My signs are a rain-proof coat, good shoes, and a staff cut from the woods;
No friend of mine takes his ease in my chair;
I have no chair, no church, no philosophy;
I lead no man to a dinner-table, library, or 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 a plain public road."

And this jubilant burst:

"O the joy of a manly self-hood!
Personality—to be servile to none—to defer to none—not to any tyrant, known or unknown,
To walk with erect carriage, a step springy and elastic,
To look with calm gaze, or with a flashing eye,
To speak with a full and sonorous voice, out of a broad chest,
To confront with your personality all the other personalities of the earth."

The lines *To a Pupil* are in the same key:

"Is reform needed? Is it through you?
The greater the reform needed, the greater the PERSONALITY you need to accomplish it.

You! do you not see how it would serve to have eyes, blood, complexion, clean and sweet?
Do you not see how it would serve to have such a Body and Soul, that when you enter the crowd, an atmosphere of desire and command enters with you, and every one is impress'd with your personality?

O the magnet! the flesh over and over!
Go, dear friend! if need be, give up all else, and commence to-day to inure yourself to pluck, reality, self-esteem, definiteness, elevatedness;
Rest not, till you rivet and publish yourself of your own personality."

XXXV.

The theory of the book implies plenty of time, and absolute unconstraint. "It has," says a European scholar, "an immense sense of space."

The centre of its standards, or the region where it is to be proved and justified, is perhaps the West—the valley of the Mississippi and the Pacific slopes. It anticipates the unfolding of the country in that direction. Few people

think how fast the theatre of our national history is being transferred from the Atlantic seaboard to the valley of the Mississippi, and beyond; and how surely the foreign forms, both in literature and manners, of our seaport towns, will fail to meet the demands of inland America. And it is with his eye upon the West, and in the spirit of our resistless onward movement, that Walt Whitman has written. He seeks to beget and lead forward the greatness which he celebrates. His poetry, therefore, is not a reminiscence, or a closing up of an era or race, as Shakspeare is, but is a prophecy, and has unbounded vista.

Especially is this true of the august character and mission it ascribes to the poet, and which find no echo or type amid the rhymesters of the present day, either here or in Europe. Whether or not its daring vaticinations will be fulfilled—whether or not a new race of bards, "native, athletic, continental," will ever appear in the United States, time alone can show. This author seems to see beneath the prevailing cheapness and simulation, agencies at work which must inevitably lead to his fulfilments. He himself claims only to have spoken the awakening word, to have given the seminal impulse.

In the Songs Before Parting, he frees himself upon the subject. They open thus:

"As I sat alone, by blue Ontario's shore,
As I mused of these mighty days, and of peace return'd, and the dead that return no more,
A Phantom, gigantic, superb, with stern visage, accosted me;
Chant me a poem, it said, *of the range of the high Soul of Poets,*
And chant of the welcome bards that breathe but my native air—invoke those bards;
And chant me, before you go, the Song of the throes of Democracy."

He then proceeds to dilate with tremendous power upon Democracy, Nativity, and Individuality, putting terrible questions to contemporary singers, and outlining a poet fit for these Lands and Days.

"Rhymes and rhymers pass away—poems distill'd from other poems pass away,
The swarms of reflectors and the polite pass, and leave ashes;
Admirers, importers, obedient persons, make but the soil of literature;
America justifies itself, give it time—no disguise can deceive it, or conceal from it—it is impassive enough,
Only toward the likes of itself will it advance to meet them,
If its poets appear, it will in due time advance to meet them—there is no fear of mistake,
(The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferr'd, till his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorb'd it.)"

The conclusion of this piece I give entire:

"Thus, by blue Ontario's shore,
While the winds fann'd me, and the waves came trooping toward me,
I sang with the Power's pulsations—and the charm of my theme was upon me,
Till the tissues that held me parted their ties upon me.

And I saw the free Soul of poets;
The loftiest bards of past ages strode before me,
Strange, large men, long unknown, undisclosed, were disclosed to me.

O my rapt song, my charm—mock me not!
Not for the bards of the past—not to invoke them have I launch'd you forth,
Not to call even those lofty bards here by Ontario's shores,
Have I sung, so capricious and loud, my savage song.

But, O strong soul of Poets,
Bards for my own land, ere I go, I invoke.

You Bards grand as these days so grand!
Bards of the Great Idea! Bards of the wondrous inventions!
Bards of the marching armies—a million soldiers waiting ever-ready,
Bards towering like hills—(no more these dots, these pigmies, these little piping straws, these gnats, that fill the hour, to pass for poets;)
Bards with songs as from burning coals, or the lightning's fork'd stripes!
Ample Ohio's bards—bards for California! inland bards;
Bards of pride! Bards tallying the ocean's roar, and the swooping eagle's scream!
You, by my charm, I invoke!"

LEAVES OF GRASS.

FURTHER PRESENTATIONS AND POINTS.

XXXVI.

A SIGNAL service LEAVES OF GRASS is to render the literary world will be the production, for the future benefit of America, of a noble school of Criticism. While the book itself is purely a poem, with nothing didactic, it yet aids toward that result more than tomes of essays and arguments. Its presentation of the difference between the mere verbal singer and the full poet, (see *The Indications*,) a difference which is entirely lost sight of in our day, is invaluable. Its very atmosphere is liberating, and its largeness and generosity must tell even upon the narrowest minded routinist. Thrice blessed its effect here! and may it hasten and speed forward! Probably never again can the land more need genuine and full-grown critics than it needs them during the present stages of its development. With all the matchless geographical area of America, her smartness, her prowess in war, her schools, her material products, incomparable worldly wealth, etc., her condition of æsthetic perception, and original products therefrom, in books or art, is appalling! The same in her "society," so-called. Theoretically we

ought to show only "great personalities;" but the circles alluded to exhibit but an average of the meagre and the mean. We have the worst manners in the world, the vulgarest ideas of beauty, and the flunkiest literature. It would seem as if America, from some unaccountable cause, has planted or allowed her least manly and least spiritual specimens on the current literary and eminent social posts. Nothing but a new race of intellectual American law-givers, of a type at present undreamed of, will redeem this condition, establish a noble standard of manners, and habilitate a literature ascending to the expression of life, and things, and man, and not remaining as now, the mere expression of literature itself—and mainly fossil and foreign literature too.

[Yet there are exceptions. The lofty and venerable name of Emerson—his genius, modern, yet blending with the purest antique, and ever dear to American young men —is secure of its perennial crown of verdure and flowers.

Then in our daily newspapers, with all their faults, there is ground for highest commendation.

Then, also, the fact that everything in America is great, except her literature, may stand as her most available excuse. America is hitherto busied with other things, and is content with the literature which will feed the common moral stomach as the butcher and baker feed the physical.]

XXXVII.

In the matter of the free "notices," mostly from a certain little class, or quintette, of writers and poetlings, who never lose an opportunity to misrepresent and slander LEAVES OF GRASS and its author, and who, from possessing access to the "literary organs," have caused a very decep-

tive appearance of general condemnatory judgment, I ought probably to imitate the example of Mr. Whitman himself, who has never once, in his whole life, deigned to make the least reply to any of them. Making the most of this impunity flowing from contempt, and every now and then taking some new accession to their number, the members of this little class have actively pursued their work, by wrenching the text, by open lie, and by covert inuendo; have continued at it for the past ten years, and are at it still. (See *N. A. Review*, January, 1867.)

I have heard Mr. Whitman himself laughingly defend them, as proving to its utmost the theory of freedom in expression on men and works, and declare that it is a provision of Nature to test the strength of new, pretensive authors. I should, however, apply to it that other kind of judgment, in which Carlyle, (Frederick, Book 14,) speaking of "that Anarchic Republic called of Letters," and certainly with reference to some of this same kind of its members, says, "When your lowest blockhead and scoundrel (usually one entity) shall have perfect freedom to spit in the face of your highest sage and hero, what a remarkably free world we shall be!"

XXXVIII.

Again, and stronger than before, I assert, before closing, the theory that the standard by which to measure the work of a poet of the very first class, is neither the standard of the parlor, of society, nor even of æsthetics or erudition, but the standard of the actual WORLD, with humanity as its choicest fruition.

Man is the crowning product of God, of Nature, because

in him all that preceded, and all that exists in objective Nature is resumed. He comprehends all, and in him what was elsewhere unconscious becomes conscious; what was physical becomes moral. He is a living proof that every single atom of dust is capable of vital life and divine aspiration. Without him Nature, though living, is dead. He vivifies it, blends it, as the body blends with and becomes dear to the soul. He only, finally, *is* Nature entire. Who shall isolate him—who discriminate—setting him in one place, and the things of the earth far apart in another place?

That which arises out of this, as a logical statement, Walt Whitman, without once making the least bit of a logical statement, contains, like some fine quality of climate, or flavor of perfect fruit, all through his book. Man, indeed, is Nature. Not for materialism; not for pantheism. Let no wretched, hasty, sectarian reader go off in a huff with premature judgment. The Spirituality of Walt Whitman, in perfect accordance with the principle I have been treating, is the most absolute yet known. The flights, the demands of the ordinary sects and creeds, to him are pitiful and mean. Inflated with the tremendous destinies and immortality of man, his pages swell and roll with religious emotion like ocean's waves. He finds, anywhere and now, men that dwarf all mythologies. He tests the works of Madonnas and Christs in his daily walk and observations.

XXXIX.

Of the form of Walt Whitman's verse, except so far as it is connected with the general purpose of the book, discussed in another place, I have yet said nothing. Coming

from the dulcet metres of Tennyson to the irregular and long-returning rhythm of LEAVES OF GRASS may well puzzle any current reader. Yet the sentences here are always poised and well timed; never slovenly, never loose, but give a sense of the utmost firmness, with the least possible limitation or constraint. There is often a flowing grace and inevitableness about them, fading gradually away and afar off, like the lines of the horizon. It is not the form of architecture, or of any exact diagrams, but the tally of trees, hills, paths, etc., or the cadence of winds, or the rhythm of waves on a beach.

In the grand literary relics of nations it may be observed that their best poetry has always spurned the routine poetic, and adopted essentially the prose form, preserving interior rhythm only. But it is to the future I leave the vast question of the form of these poems.

["In literature the ascendancy of prose is always in direct ratio to the advance of the human spirit, and the clearing up of the intelligence. As a vehicle for the movement of ideas, it is far more adequate than poetry, and is therefore a better exponent of modern civilization. *Substantially*, the barriers between these two are already broken down, so that the terms poetry and prose no longer represent distinct circles of thought and emotion; they also become assimilated in *form* and *grammar* in proportion as the sensuous life of language dies out, and the spiritual qualities predominate. Thus one of the most marked peculiarities of modern languages is what might be called their prose organization—i. e., their prosody or metrical system is founded, not on quantity, but on accentuation, so that by this change the chief distinction between *oratio vincta* and *oratio soluta*, as

understood by the ancients, is lost; and we may confidently look forward to the time when the fusion of these forms shall be rendered more complete by the abolition of that 'bondage of rhyming' which Milton condemns as 'the invention of a barbarous age,' and Ben Jonson characterises as 'wresting words from their true calling.' There is no good reason why the relative duration of successive syllables in time should have been insisted on as essential to poetry; for we might with equal propriety follow the example of Simmias of Rhodes, and establish a canon that the lines should be of such length, and so arranged, that the finished poem would present to the eye the form of a heart, a battle-axe, an egg, a flute, or a phœnix. But the constant tendency in human speech is to shake off these conventional shackles, in proportion as it frees itself from the dominion of the senses, and becomes an organ of revelation for the higher reflective faculties. The spiritualising and enfranchising influence of Christianity transformed Greek into an accentuated language; and Grimm has shown that the same process took place also in German, which originally made quantity, or the temporal value of the vowels, the basis of its prosodical system."—Ernst Von Lasaulx. *Art. in N. A. Rev.*]

XL.

I must not forget to note the continuously sustained attitude of Leaves of Grass towards demonstrable science. It always fully and reverently acknowledges science, and the work of the scientist.

"Savantism.

"Thither, as I look, I see each result and glory retracing itself and nestling close, always obligated;

Thither hours, months, years—thither trades, compacts, establishments, even the most minute;
Thither every-day life, speech, utensils, politics, persons, estates;
Thither we also, I with my leaves and songs, trustful, admirant,
As a father, to his father going, takes his children along with him."

Also these verses from his leading poem:

"I accept reality, and dare not question it;
Materialism first and last imbuing.

Hurrah for positive science! long live exact demonstration!
Fetch stonecrop mixt with cedar and branches of lilac;
This is the lexicographer—this the chemist—this made a grammar of the old cartouches;
These mariners put the ship through dangerous unknown seas;
This is the geologist—this works with the scalpel—and this is a mathematician.

Gentlemen! to you the first honors always:
Your facts are useful and real—and yet they are not my dwelling;
(I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling.)"

XLI.

The poet himself, I understand, considers his work as still lacking in a part, or pieces, specially expressive of the religious aspirational elements, and, I believe, entertains the wish and design yet to write out such a part, or cluster of pieces, and thus complete his programme. Of course I do not object to this; I should heartily welcome the new pieces. Yet I do not see the need of them, in order to complete LEAVES OF GRASS. Because, for the proper use of the religious elements in the traits of a character, namely, to leaven all the rest, and tinge the acts and speech, and the days of life—and not for a separate and isolated thing, pro-

mulged by itself—I find this by far the most religious book I ever met. It is the broad hymn of the praise of things; all the works of the Creative Father are sung in joyous strains. An undercurrent of entire piety, sometimes buoyant and credulous as a child's, sometimes rapt as any psalm of the Hebrew prophets, and sometimes showing the attitude of science, in the midst of its explorations and attainments, bowed down before the awfulness and impenetrableness of the least fact, the least law, of the universe, runs through the poems, and never flags. See verses 26 to 32, inclusive, in *Starting from Fish-Shape Paumanok;* also verses 5, 6, and 7, in *Elemental Drifts.*

The book is eminently religious, because its distinctive trait is Humanity. When I realize the abysses of passionate love, and the many silent throes of brooding aspiration that underlie it, and out of which only it could have been written, I am inexpressibly awed before the thing, a human being, a Soul; and the capacity of literature to express that eternal marvel assumes in it new proportions.

XLII.

Of the future reception of the poem I feel no doubt. At present Walt Whitman, from his novelty alone, with his unprecedented vastness, his scorn of extrinsic ornament, etc., cannot be measured, cannot well be understood. He stretches into the future as other writers into the past, and is the most self-denying artist to the claims of immediate results and approbation that ever lived. A large portion of his poetry is made with reference to its effects upon his readers long after his own death.

With him are, however, the main tendencies of our era,

and they must in due time justify him. At the present hour he has a limited circle of fervently appreciative readers. In a decade they will be counted by thousands; and in still another, a newer, younger race, growing up, will, as it were, be born to him.

Then will be formed, as time advances, sufficient vista through which only this, or any grand work, can to advantage be seen. Then, surrounded by the associations of the past, of history, of a hero, a bard, become long since dead, will his most important meanings take their application. Then, in its effect on many a rapt brain, absorbing for example, the 14th, 15th, and 16th stanzas of *So Long*, will the poem's true power appear:

> "This is no book;
> Who touches this, touches a man."

Like Egypt's lord, he builds against his form's annihilation. But what are pyramids compared to one genuine throb of the passionate human soul? Fixed in the desert of old Africa, the voiceless blocks yet stand, after six thousand years, mocking, discarding him who piled them. But here a vaster, subtler, more enduring mausoleum. Here, though dead, volition, speech, the same.

Strange immortality! For in this book Walt Whitman, even in his habit as he lived, and ever gathering hearts of young and old, is to surely walk, untouched by death, down through the long succession of all the future ages of America.

PART SECOND.

PERSONAL SKETCH.

DRUM-TAPS.

PERSONAL SKETCH.

1.

WALT WHITMAN was born in the farm village of West Hills, on Long Island, New York, May 31, 1819. His father's stock, which was of English immigration, seems to have originally settled there with the earliest planting of the island, some four or five generations previously.

West Hills is about thirty miles from New York city. It is a secluded place, of much natural picturesqueness. The hills indicated by its name are varied with fertile valleys. It is a neighborhood of thinly scattered country houses, with apple orchards, fields of grass and grain, and winding lanes lined with locust trees. Great springs of cold, sweet water curiously rise toward the tops of the hills, and their course down and along the lower grounds may be traced by the borders of extra richness and verdure.

Some two or three miles off, near Cold Spring, Queen's county, from a farm-house on the side of another hill, a wild, romantic, and bleaker region, we find the maternal source. Here lived the Van Velsors, of genuine Hollandic blood, and also an old family. Major Van Velsor had for his wife Amy Williams, descended from a race of mariners; her father and brothers, and grandfather's people too, all famous seagoing folk. From this couple came the mother

of our poet. The Van Velsors were noted people for horses. The Major always had a fine one, and his boys followed suit; and the poet's future mother was a daily and daring horse-rider, even as a girl.

A description of these two families, and their domestic interiors, would be a sample of the life of the middle class of American country people of three generations since, in the early part of the century. Both sexes labored with their own hands. The Whitmans lived in a long story-and-a-half farm-house, hugely timbered, which is still standing. A great smoke-canopied kitchen, with vast hearth and chimney, formed one end of the house. The existence of slavery in New York at that time, and the possession by the family of some twelve or fifteen slaves, house and field servants, gave things quite a patriarchal look. The very young darkies could be seen, a swarm of them, toward sundown, in this kitchen, squatted in a circle on the floor, eating their supper of Indian pudding and milk. In the house, and in food and furniture, all was rude, but substantial. No carpets nor stoves were known, and no coffee, and tea or sugar only for the women. Rousing wood fires gave both warmth and light on winter nights. Pork, poultry, beef, and all the ordinary vegetables and grains were plentiful. Cider was the men's common drink, and used at meals. The clothes were mainly homespun. Journeys were made by both men and women on horseback. Books were scarce. The annual copy of the Almanac was a treat, and was pored over through the long winter evenings.

I must not forget to mention that both these families were near enough to the sea to behold it from the high

places, and to hear in still hours the roar of the surf; the latter, after a storm, giving a peculiar sound at night. Then all hands, male and female, went down frequently on beach and bathing parties, and the men on practical expeditions for cutting salt hay, and for clamming and fishing. And so, out of such embryonage, appear the parents and earliest childhood scenes of the poet—the father Walter Whitman, and the mother Louisa Van Velsor.

From the immediate mother of the poet come, I think, his chief traits. She, with her good health and good sense, her kind and generous heart, cheerfulness, equanimity, her big family of sons and daughters, has now passed through a long and assiduous life, affording a sample of the perfect woman and mother. I have more than once heard Walt Whitman say that his views of humanity and of the female sex could never have been what they are, if he had not had the practical proof of his mother and other noble women always before him.

I should not neglect to put on record a statement, also, of the father of the poet, as a most honorable man, a good citizen, parent, and neighbor. He was a large, quiet, serious man, very kind to children and animals. For some years he was a farmer on his own land, but afterwards went into business, house-building and carpentering.

I am not able, nor is it necessary, to give the particulars of the poet's youthful life. While a child, after living at the natal farm a brief time, his parents moved to Brooklyn, and he went to the public school there through certain years, yet every summer visiting the place of birth in the country again. Brooklyn, be it remembered, was a charming rural town at that time, far different from the huge and crowded city it now is.

[Here is one item of his childhood: On the visit of General Lafayette to this country, in 1825, he came over to Brooklyn in state, and rode through the city. The children of the schools turned out to join in the welcome. An edifice for a free public library for youths was just then commencing, and Lafayette consented to stop on his way and lay the corner-stone. Numerous children arriving on the ground, where a huge irregular excavation for the building was already dug, surrounded with heaps of rough stone, several gentlemen assisted in lifting the children to safe or convenient spots to see the ceremony. Among the rest, Lafayette, also helping the children, took up the five-year-old Walt Whitman, and pressing the child a moment to his breast, and giving him a kiss, handed him down to a safe spot in the excavation.]

II.

When a boy of thirteen he went to work in a printing office, and learned to set type. At sixteen and seventeen, I find him spending his summers in the country, and along the sea-side of the island, teaching country school, and "boarding round" among the families of his pupils. From this field of employment he sent a short sketch or story to that once famous monthly the *Democratic Review*. The sketch made a hit, and was copied and commended widely. Other sketches and writings for the *Review* followed. Whitman left his country school-teaching and came to New York.

For a few years he now seems to be a member of that light battalion of writers for the press who, with facile pen, compose tale, report, editorial, or what not, for pleasure

and a living; a peculiar class, always to be found in any large city. Once in a while he appears at the political mass meetings as a speaker. He is on the Democratic side, at the time going for Van Buren for President, and, in due course, for Polk. He speaks in New York, and down on Long Island, where he is made much of. It is probable, however, that all is done with a view to exercise as largely as anything else.

Through this period—from 1837 to 1848—without entering into particulars, it is enough to say that he sounded all experiences of life, with all their passions, pleasures, and abandonments. He was young, in perfect bodily condition, and had the city of New York and its ample opportunities around him. I trace this period in some of the poems in the *Children of Adam*, and occasionally in other parts of his book, including *Calamus*. Those who have met the poet of late years, and think of him only as the composed and gray-bearded man of the present, must not forget, in reading his LEAVES, those previous and more ardent stages of his career. Though of Walt Whitman it may be said that he is always young.

I may mention here a characteristic, which, however, belongs not to this period alone. At all times he has liked well the society of the class called "common people." He has gone much with such persons, for instance, as the New York bay pilots, the fishermen down Long Island, certain country farmers and city mechanics, and especially the Broadway stage-drivers. The latter class for years have adopted him as a special favorite and chum. He has ridden on top of the stages with them, gone of an afternoon along Broadway, or from Fulton Ferry or Bowling Green up to

Twenty-third street; so noting and absorbing the life and objects of his endeared "Mannahatta." He has often and often visited in and around the island all such places as the ship-yards, the foundries, etc.; is fond of the public shows, and delights in those extra gala-days or distinguished receptions when "million-footed Manhattan descends to her pavements."

The artistic pleasure he has always most cared for is the Italian opera, or some good band or concert. Many passages of his poetry were composed in the gallery of the New York Academy during the opera performances.

III.

In 1849 he began traveling. Passing down through Pennsylvania and Maryland, he crossed the Alleghanies, went aboard a small trading steamer at Wheeling, and by slow stages, and with many and long stoppages and detours, journeyed along and down the Ohio river. In the same manner, well pleased with western steamboat life and its scenes, he descended by degrees the Mississippi. In New Orleans he edited a newspaper, and lived there a year, when he again ascended the Mississippi to St. Louis; moved through that region, explored the Illinois river and the towns along its bank, and lingered some while in Wisconsin and among the great lakes; stopt north of the straits of Mackinaw, also at Niagara and in Canada. He saw Western and Northwestern nature and character in all their phases, and probably took there and then the decided inspiration of his future poetry.

After some two years, returning to Brooklyn, I trace him again trying his hand at a printer's occupation. He started

a newspaper, first as weekly and then as daily. He sold out, and went into business as carpenter and builder, (his father's trade;) worked with his own hands at the rougher work, and built and sold moderate-priced houses.

It is at this period (1853 and the seasons immediately following,) that I come on the first inkling of LEAVES OF GRASS. Walt Whitman is now thirty-four years old, and in the full fruition of health and physique. There is a lull or interval in his house-building business, so that he has no cares from that quarter.

In 1855, then, after many manuscript doings and undoings, and much matter destroyed, and two or three complete re-writings, the essential foundation of LEAVES OF GRASS was laid and the superstructure raised, in the piece called *Walt Whitman*, and some nine or ten smaller pieces, forming the thin quarto or first edition. Indubitably there must have been, as Emerson says, "a long foreground somewhere" to this first quarto. But that foreground, that vast previous, ante-dating requirement of physical, moral, and emotional experiences, will forever remain untold. The history of the First publication, and also of the Second, Third, and Fourth growths, or issues, I have already narrated.

Now follows the war. But I wish, before entering upon that, to give something like a personal description of the man who made LEAVES OF GRASS.

IV.

In person Walt Whitman is much above the average size, with remarkably perfect physical proportions.

A writer, Rev. Mr. Conway, in the London *Fortnightly*

Review, describing a visit to him, and their spending a summer day together, says:

"We passed the remainder of the day roaming, or 'loafing,' on Staten Island, where we had shade, and many miles of a beautiful beach. While we bathed I was impressed by a certain grandeur about the man, and remembered the picture of Bacchus on the wall of his room. I then perceived that the sun had put a red mask on his face and neck, and that his body was a ruddy blonde, pure and noble, his form being at the same time remarkable for fine curves and for that grace of movement which is the flower of shapely and well-knit bones. His head was oviform in every way; his hair, which was strongly mixed with gray, was cut close to his head, and, with his beard, was in strange contrast to the almost infantine fullness and serenity of his face. This serenity, however, came from the quiet light blue eyes, and above these there were three or four deep horizontal furrows, which life had ploughed. The first glow of any kind that I saw about him was when he entered the water, which he fairly hugged with a lover's enthusiasm. But when he was talking about that which deeply interested him, his voice, always gentle and clear, became slow, and his eyelids had a tendency to decline over his eyes. It was impossible not to feel at every moment the reality of every word and movement of the man, and also the surprising delicacy of one who was even freer with his pen than honest Montaigne."

Of his familiar figure and gait, as seen on the wide side-walk of crowded Broadway, in his own city, of a fine afternoon—or, of late years, on Pennsylvania avenue, in Washington—I give the following easily-recognized portraiture. It is from a Washington letter, written by one himself a poet, and printed (February, 1866) in a Columbus, Ohio, periodical:

"There are a few interesting persons here for whom you do not look, and you shall therefore come upon them unexpectediy. Walk up the Avenue at four o'clock, for instance. Who is this that cometh as if breasting or blown by a strong, slow wind—gigantic in expression at least,

paternal, and (begging pardon of Apollo) somewhat Jove-like? This is one of those you didn't expect to see, and you may as well look at him, for you cannot help it. Once (and, as you love and reverence that gentle father of our newer country, you may well bear this in reverent memory while you gaze,) Abraham Lincoln, seeing this one passing from his White House window, and following him with genial eyes, said, in that voice we all remember here—'Well, *he* looks like a MAN.'"

Yet those who entertain great expectations Walt Whitman will probably disappoint at first sight. I have known and seen him for years, under various surroundings, in company, on rambles, by the sick cots in the army hospitals, and elsewhere; and I should describe him, off-hand, as a cheerful, rather quiet man, easily pleased with others, letting them do most of the talking, seeking not the least conquest or display, never exhibiting any depression of spirits, asking very few questions, and at first view making the impression on any unsuspecting stranger of a good-willed, healthy character, without the least ostensible mark of the philosopher or the poet; but all the while, though thus passive and receptive, yet evidently the most masculine of beings.

Observed more closely, he suggests ideas as of the Beginners, the Adamic men. One notes the great strength of his face, of the fullest Greek pattern, and combining the quality of weight with that which soars and ascends; head high-domed and perfectly symmetrical, with no bulging of the forehead; brows remarkably arching; nose straight and broad, with a strong square bridge; gray beard, in bushy fleeces or locks; florid countenance, well seamed; blue eyes, with very heavy projecting lids; and in physiognomy, as in his whole form withal, a certain cast of chivalry:

"Douglas! Douglas! tender and true."

While not incapable, also, on due occasions, of measureless obstinacy and hauteur.

v.

The "eccentricity" of Walt Whitman, though it has been part of the material of many a paragraphist and magazine writer for the last ten years, has not a particle of real foundation. The truth simply is, that as to "fashion" and all the mere fopperies and conventional trimmings, which American society is perhaps more the slave of than any European people, he quietly ignores them in his dress and demeanor, as will always any man of full physique and noble and independent nature. No essential, however, no universal law, nothing belonging to the gentleman in the true sense, does he ever ignore. Far above oddity or queerness, I think the verdict of every good observer, noticing him with attention, will finally be that, if anything makes him eccentric, it is because he, above all the rest, is so free from eccentricity.

Of his manners I should say, the best statement of their dominant spirit, as exemplified by his life, is to be found in his own chant, *Manhattan's Streets I Sauntered Pondering;* but that beneath, and for its occasions, he has perceptive wisdom, or good Yankee shrewdness, also.

It may be because everything in his personal appearance is so relentlessly averaged to the idea of a complete man, that strangers involuntarily ascribe to him all sorts of characters, according to their first impressions. I knew a lady who persisted in calling him "Doctor," and even consulting him professionally, without ever stopping to inquire about, and even after she had been told, the truth. During his

services in the army hospitals, of which I shall presently speak, various myths were floating about concerning him. Now he was a benevolent Catholic priest—then some unknown army general, or retired sea captain; and at one time he was the owner of the whole Cunard line of steamers. To be taken for a Californian has been common.

One remembers his own account of the poet of the Kosmos, as given in the *Morning Romanza:*

"The authors take him for an author, and the artists for an artist,
And the laborers perceive he could labor with them and love them;
No matter what the work is, that he is the one to follow it, or has follow'd it,
No matter what the nation, that he might find his brothers and sisters there.

The gentleman of perfect blood acknowledges his perfect blood;
The insulter, the prostitute, the angry person, the beggar, see themselves in the ways of him—he strangely transmutes them,
They are not vile any more—they hardly know themselves, they are so grown."

VI.

There probably lives not another man so genuinely and utterly indifferent to literary abuse, or to "public opinion," either when favorable or unfavorable. He has never used the usual means to defend his reputation. It has been his fate to have his book and his personal character atrociously intercepted from their due audience with the public, whose minds have been plied and preoccupied by detractions, and the meanest misreports and falsehoods.

In the midst of these I send forth my Notes, with an object, if I know my own mind, far different from mere eulogy. I am well aware, first, that no one volume, how-

ever great or specially attractive to its admirers, monopolizes either intrinsic merit or formative beauty, but that of the first-class works in the world's literature, each is good, supremely good, after its kind, and is simply perfect as any can be perfect; and second, that my poet personally is, of course, but one of thousands of deserving men; and I know that he would be the first to laugh to derision any elevation of himself as exceptionally good.

And now I proceed to an account of the attitude of Walt Whitman during the war.

VII.

Soon after the opening of the war, I find him down in the field, making himself practically useful among the wounded. He was first drawn there on behalf of his brother, Lieutenant-Colonel George W. Whitman, 51st New York Veterans, who was hit in the face by a piece of shell at Fredericksburgh.

He commences service in 1862, supporting himself during the ensuing two or three years by correspondence with northern newspapers. I pick out from this quite extensive correspondence one or two long letters devoted to current narratives of the hospitals and wounded, and am able, from them, to give some direct glimpses into his life at this period. I make the following extract from a letter at Fredericksburgh, the third or fourth day after the battle of the middle of December, 1862:

"Spent a good part of the day in a large brick mansion, on the banks of the Rappahannock, immediately opposite Fredericksburgh. It is used as a hospital since the battle, and seems to have received only the worst cases. Out doors, at the foot of a tree, within ten yards of the front of

the house, I notice a heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, hands, &c., about a load for a one-horse cart. Several dead bodies lie near, each covered with its brown woolen blanket. In the door-yard, toward the river, are fresh graves, mostly of officers, their names on pieces of barrel staves or broken board, stuck in the dirt. (Most of these bodies were subsequently taken up and transported North to their friends.)

"The house is quite crowded, everything impromptu, no system, all bad enough, but I have no doubt the best that can be done; all the wounds pretty bad, some frightful, the men in their old clothes, unclean and bloody. Some of the wounded are rebel officers, prisoners. One, a Mississippian—a captain—hit badly in leg, I talked with some time; he asked me for papers, which I gave him. (I saw him three months afterward in Washington, with leg amputated, doing well.)

"I went through the rooms, down stairs and up. Some of the men were dying. I had nothing to give at that visit, but wrote a few letters to folks home, mothers, &c. Also talked to three or four, who seemed most susceptible to it, and needing it."

"Dec. 22 to 31.—Am among the regimental, brigade, and division hospitals somewhat. Few at home realize that these are merely tents, and sometimes very poor ones, the wounded lying on the ground, lucky if their blanket is spread on a layer of pine or hemlock twigs, or some leaves. No cots; seldom even a mattress on the ground. It is pretty cold. I go around from one case to another. I do not see that I can do any good, but I cannot leave them. Once in a while some youngster holds on to me convulsively, and I do what I can for him; at any rate, stop with him and sit near him for hours, if he wishes it.

"Beside the hospitals, I also go occasionally on long tours through the camps, talking with the men, &c. Sometimes at night among the groups around the fires, in their shebang enclosures of bushes. I soon get acquainted anywhere in camp, with officers or men, and am always well used. Sometimes I go down on picket with the regiments I know best."

After continuing in front through the winter, he returns to Washington, where the wounded and sick have mainly been concentrated. The Capital City, truly, is now one

huge hospital; and there Whitman establishes himself, and thenceforward, for several years, has but one daily and nightly avocation.

I make the following excerpts from the narratives alluded to, as samples of his daily work:

"My custom is to go through a ward, or collection of wards, endeavoring to give some trifle to each, without missing any. Even a sweet biscuit, a sheet of paper, or a passing word of friendliness, or but a look or nod, if no more. In this way I go among large numbers without delaying, yet do not hurry. I find out the general mood of the ward at the time; sometimes see that there is a heavy weight of listlessness prevailing, and the whole ward wants cheering up. I, perhaps, read to the men, to break the spell; calling them around me, careful to sit away from the cot of any one who is very bad with sickness or wounds. Also, I find out, by going through in this way, the cases that need special attention, and can then devote proper time to them. Of course, I am very cautious among the patients, in giving them food. I always confer with the doctor, or find out from the nurse or ward-master about a new case. But I soon get sufficiently familiar with what is to be avoided, and learn also to judge almost intuitively what is best."

"I buy, during the hot weather, boxes of oranges from time to time, and distribute them among the men; also preserved peaches and other fruits; also lemons and sugar, for lemonade. Tobacco is also much in demand. Large numbers of the men come up, as usual, without a cent of money. Through the assistance of friends in Brooklyn and Boston, I am again able to help many of those that fail in my way. It is only a small sum in each case, but it is much to them. As before, I go around daily and talk with the men, to cheer them up."

He alludes to writing letters by the bed-side, and says:

"I do a good deal of this, of course, writing all kinds, including love-letters. Many sick and wounded soldiers have not written home to parents, brothers, sisters, and even wives, for one reason or another, for a long, long time. Some are poor writers, some cannot get paper and

envelopes; many have an aversion to writing because they dread to worry the folks at home—the facts about them are so sad to tell. I always encourage the men to write, and promptly write for them."

A glimpse of the scenes after Chancellorsville:

"As I write this, in May, 1863, the wounded have begun to arrive from Hooker's command from bloody Chancellorsville. I was down among the first arrivals. The men in charge of them told me the bad cases were yet to come. If that is so, I pity them, for these are bad enough. You ought to see the scene of the wounded arriving at the landing here foot of Sixth street at night. Two boat loads came about half-past seven last night. A little after eight, it rained a long and violent shower. The poor, pale, helpless soldiers had been debarked, and lay around on the wharf and neighborhood anywhere. The rain was, probably, grateful to them; at any rate they were exposed to it.

"The few torches light up the spectacle. All around on the wharf, on the ground, out on side places, &c., the men are lying on blankets and old quilts, with the bloody rags bound round heads, arms, legs, &c. The attendants are few, and at night few outsiders also—only a few hard-worked transportation men and drivers. (The wounded are getting to be common, and people grow callous.) The men, whatever their condition, lie there, and patiently wait till their turn comes to be taken up. Near by the ambulances are now arriving in clusters, and one after another is called to back up and take its load. Extreme cases are sent off on stretchers. The men generally make little or no ado, whatever their sufferings. A few groans that cannot be repressed, and occasionally a scream of pain as they lift a man into the ambulance.

"To-day, as I write, hundreds more are expected, and to-morrow and the next day more, and so on for many days."

"The soldiers are nearly all young men, and far more American than is generally supposed—I should say nine-tenths are native born. Among the arrivals from Chancellorsville I find a large proportion of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois men. As usual, there are all sorts of wounds. Some of the men are fearfully burnt from the explosion of artillery caissons. One ward has a long row of officers, some with ugly hurts. Yes-

terday was, perhaps, worse than usual. Amputations are going on—the attendants are dressing wounds. As you pass by you must be on your guard where you look. I saw, the other day, a gentleman, a visitor, apparently from curiosity, in one of the wards, stop and turn a moment to look at an awful wound they were probing, &c. He turned pale, and in a moment more he had fainted away and fallen on the floor."

An episode—the death of a New York soldier:

"This afternoon, July 22, 1863, I spent a long time with a young man I have been with a good deal from time to time, named 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 asked him what I should read. He said: 'Make your own choice.' I opened at the close of one of the first books of the Evangelists, and read the chapters describing the latter hours of Christ and the scenes at the crucifixion. The poor, wasted young man asked me to read the following chapter also, how Christ rose again. I read very slowly, for Oscar was feeble. It pleased him very much, yet the tears were in his eyes. He asked me if I enjoyed religion. I said: 'Perhaps not, my dear, in the way you mean, and yet, maybe, it is the same thing.' He said: 'It is my chief reliance.' He talked of death, and said he did not fear it. I said: 'Why, Oscar, don't you think you will get well?' He said: 'I may, but it is not probable.' He spoke calmly of his condition. The wound was very bad; it discharged much. Then the diarrhœa had prostrated him, and I felt that he was even then the same as dying. He behaved very manly and affectionate. The kiss I gave him as I was about leaving he returned fourfold. He gave me his mother's address, Mrs. Sally D. Wilber, Alleghany post-office, Cattaraugus county, New York. I had several such interviews with him. He died a few days after the one just described."

And here also a characteristic scene in another of those long barracks:

"It is Sunday afternoon, (middle of summer, 1864,) hot and oppressive, and very silent through the ward. I am taking care of a critical case,

now lying in a half lethargy. Near where I sit is a suffering rebel, from the 8th Louisiana; his name is Irving. He has been here a long time, badly wounded, and has lately had his leg amputated. It is not doing very well. Right opposite me is a sick soldier boy, laid down with his clothes on, sleeping, looking much wasted, his pallid face on his arm. I see by the yellow trimming on his jacket that he is a cavalry boy. He looks so handsome as he sleeps, one must needs go nearer to him. I step softly over to him, and find by his card that he is named William Cone, of the 1st Maine cavalry, and his folks live in Skowhegan."

Mr. Whitman spends the winter of 1863–4 with the army at Brandy Station and Culpepper, Virginia, among the brigade and division hospitals, moving in the same scenes and performing similar work.

The following summer, the bloody holocaust of the Wilderness, and the fierce promenade down to the James river, give him plenty to do, and he does it well, until he himself is prostrated.* But I cannot follow him in the details of this career. They would fill a volume.

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* In the hot summer of 1864, Whitman, who up to that period had been the picture of health and strong, unsurpassed physique, was taken down with an illness which, although he recovered from it, has left effects upon him to this day. He was nurse at the time to a number of soldiers, badly wounded in the late battles, and whose wounds, from previous enforced neglect and the intense heat of the weather, were mortified, and several corrupted with worms. He remained assiduously night and day with these lamentable cases. The consequence was that his system, doubtless weakened by anxiety, became deeply saturated with the worst poison of hospital malaria. He was ordered north by the physicians; an illness of six months followed, the first sickness in his life.

In February, 1865, wishing to return to the field of his labors, in Washington, he received from the then head of the Department of the Interior an appointment to a clerkship. This gave him leisure for hospital visits, and secured him an income. He performed his clerical work well, and was promoted. He was now dividing his leisure hours between services to the wounded and in composing the memorial to Abraham Lincoln, "*When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloomed.*" It was at this juncture

[An army surgeon who at the time watched with curiosity Mr. Whitman's movements among the soldiers in the hospitals has since told me that his principles of operation, effective as they were, seemed strangely few, simple, and on a low key: to act upon the appetite, to cheer by a healthy and fitly bracing appearance and demeanor, and to fill and satisfy, in certain cases, the affectional longings of the patients, was about all. He carried among them no sentimentalism nor moralizing; spoke not to any man of his "sins"; but gave something good to eat, a buoying word, or a trifling gift and a look. He appeared with ruddy face, clean dress, with a flower or a green sprig in the lappet of his coat. Crossing the fields in summer he would gather a great bunch of dandelion blossoms, and red and white clover, to bring and scatter on the cots, as reminders of out-door air and sunshine.

When practicable, he came to the long and crowded wards of the maimed, the feeble, and the dying, only after preparations as for a festival—strengthened by a good meal, rest, the bath, and fresh underclothes. He entered with a huge haversack slung over his shoulder, full of appropriate

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that a new Secretary, Hon. James Harlan, suddenly removed him from his situation, for the reason that "he was the author of LEAVES OF GRASS." The circumstances are far more brutal and infamous than is generally known. An eminent person, intimate with Mr. Harlan, went to him, and in a long interview thoroughly proved Walt Whitman's personal character, and the theory and intentions, at least, of his book. Harlan, in reply, merely said that the author of LEAVES OF GRASS should never be allowed in his department.

Immediately on this occurrence, (July, 1865,) Mr. Whitman was sent for by a distinguished cabinet officer, and offered a place at his disposal, under Government, of moderate pay, but an honorable position. This he accepted, and has continued to occupy since.

articles, with parcels under his arms, and protuberant pockets. He would sometimes come in summer with a good-sized basket, filled with oranges, and would go round for hours paring and dividing them among the feverish and thirsty.]

VIII.

I would say to the reader that I have dwelt upon this portion of Walt Whitman's life, not so much because it enters into the statement of his biography, as because it really enters into the statement of his poetry, and affords a light through which alone the later pieces, and in some sort the whole of his work can be fitly construed. His large, oceanic nature doubtless enjoyed fully, and grew all the larger from, the pouring out of its powerful currents of magnetism; and this is evident in his pieces since 1861.

The statement is also needed with reference to the country, for it rises to national proportions. To more than a hundred thousand suffering soldiers was he, during the war, personally the cheering visitor, and ministered in some form to their direct needs of body and spirit; soldiers from every quarter, west, east, north, and south—for he treated the rebel wounded the same as the rest.

Of course there were plenty of others, men and women, who engaged faithfully in the same service. But it is probable that no other was so endowed for it as Walt Whitman. I should say his whole character culminates here; and, as a country is best viewed by ascending some peak, so from this point his life and book are to be read and understood.

Since the close of the war he has continued his ministra-

tions among the sick and wounded just the same, down to the present time, (March, 1867.) Every Sunday finds him at the hospital, and he frequently goes there during the week. For the maimed and the infirm of the war we have yet among us, in many a dreary case, and the wounds of the contest are still unhealed.

DRUM-TAPS.

1.

OUT of that experience in camp and hospital the pieces called DRUM-TAPS were produced. Their descriptions and pictures, therefore, come from life. The vivid incidents of *The Dresser* are but daguerreotypes of the poet's own actual movements among the bad cases of the wounded after a battle. The same personal knowledge runs through *A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Grey and Dim; Come Up from the Fields, Father*, etc., etc.

The reader of DRUM-TAPS soon discovers that it is not the purpose of the poet to portray battles and campaigns, or to celebrate special leaders or military prowess, but rather to chant the human aspects of anguish that follow in the train of war. He perhaps feels that the permanent condition of modern society is that of peace; that war, as a business, as a means of growth, has served its time, and that, notwithstanding the vast difference between ancient and modern warfare, both in the spirit and in the means, Homer's pictures are essentially true yet, and no additions to them can be made. War can never be to us what it has been to the nations of all ages down to the present; never the main fact—the paramount condition, tyrannizing over all the affairs of national and individual life; but only an

episode, a passing interruption; and the poet who in our day would be as true to his nation and times as Homer was to his, must treat of it from the standpoint of peace and progress, and even benevolence. Vast armies rise up in a night, and disappear in a day—a million of men, inured to battle and to blood, go back to the avocations of peace without a moment's confusion or delay—indicating clearly the tendency that prevails. Hence those readers who, from the turbulent and audacious spirit of LEAVES OF GRASS, expected to find in this little volume all the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war," have been disappointed.

Apostrophizing the genius of America in the supreme hour of victory, he says:

"No poem proud, I, chanting, bring to thee—nor mastery's rapturous verse;
But a little book containing night's darkness and blood-dripping wounds,
And psalms of the dead."

The collection is also remarkable for the absence of all sectional or partisan feeling. Under the head of *Reconciliation* are these lines:

"Word over all, beautiful as the sky!
Beautiful that war, and all its deeds of carnage, must in time be utterly lost!
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly, softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world;
. . . For my enemy is dead—a man divine as myself is dead;
I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin—I draw near;
I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin."

But I am anticipating.

II.

The collection opens with a piece descriptive of the sudden and general uprising of the people of the Northern States when the national flag was fired on at Fort Sumter. It specially describes the electric scene that followed in New York city, and has the effect of a sudden determined alarum.

The *Banner at Daybreak* contains a slight dramatic plot, in which figure a father and his child and the poet. The general spirit of the dialogue is that of intense devotion to the national flag:

"Not houses of peace are you, nor any nor all their prosperity, (if need be, you shall have every one of those houses to destroy them;
You thought not to destroy those valuable houses, standing fast, full of comfort, built with money;
May they stand fast, then? Not an hour, unless you, above them and all, stand fast!)"

The *Centenarian's Story*, also slightly dramatic, is a tradition of the battle of Long Island, at the commencement of the Revolutionary War. *Pioneers! O Pioneers!* is a measured chant and refrain, in which the masses of the West and the great Territories seem to be marching in procession, uttering a characteristic recitative. It has the sense of steady, irresistible motion and vastness. I consider it one of the choicest of his lyrics. *Rise O Days from Your Fathomless Deeps*, and *Years of the Unperformed*, are samples of how much meaning and power can be put into words; each line of these pieces seems to stagger under the piled-up weight it carries. Indeed the former of the two is an unequalled study in phrasing. Its Herculean lines move on as if the elemental displays and throes of the globe were working in a chant.

A Broadway Pageant (a sort of episode of which there are two or three in the book) records, or rather branches out from, the visit of the Japanese embassy at New York, in 1860. It is full of flowing pictures, and forms a curious blending of the subjective and objective.

"The Originatress comes,
The land of Paradise—land of the Caucasus—the nest of birth,
The nest of languages, the bequeather of poems, the race of eld,
Florid with blood, pensive, rapt with musing, hot with passion,
Sultry with perfume, with ample and flowing garments,
With sunburnt visage, with intense soul and glittering eyes,
The race of Brahma comes!"

Then there are through the collection many small pieces, each full of its own pulsation. Here is one of those throbbing sonatas:

"Bathed in war's perfume—delicate flag!
O to hear you call the sailors and the soldiers! flag like a beautiful woman!
O to hear the tramp, tramp, of a million answering men! O the ships they arm with joy!
O to see you leap and beckon from the tall masts of ships!
O to see you peering down on the sailors on the decks!
Flag like the eyes of women."

There are numerous *genre* sketches, mostly of camp life, the bivouac, the moon pouring floods of silver on the battle-field, etc. Then in the SEQUEL TO DRUM-TAPS a piece of importance which needs to be specially analyzed.

III.

The assassination of President Lincoln made a very deep and painful impression upon the poet, who had formed a personal attachment to the President, regarding him as by

far the noblest and purest of the political characters of the time; and, beyond that, as a sort of representative historical American man.

Although DRUM-TAPS had been finished, as supposed, and a few copies bound, the author, on the death of Mr. Lincoln, determined to revoke them and hold the book back awhile. In a few weeks thereafter, when more composed, he planned out and began the construction of that, in some respects, most remarkable of all his chants, *When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloomed.* When it was concluded he added *O Captain, My Captain,* and a few other pieces, and joining them to the previous collection, under the title of a SEQUEL TO DRUM-TAPS, issued both groups entire, as his lyrical expression of the war, fitly culminating in the piece, "*When Lilacs last,*" &c., as the epical close of that dark theme.

The main effect of this poem is of strong solemn and varied music; and it involves in its construction a principle after which perhaps the great composers most work—namely, spiritual auricular analogy. At first it would seem to defy analysis, so rapt is it, and so indirect. No reference whatever is made to the mere facts of Lincoln's death; the poet does not even dwell upon its unprovoked atrocity, and only occasionally is the tone that of lamentation; but, with the intuitions of the grand art, which is the most complex when it seems most simple, he seizes upon three beautiful facts of Nature, which he weaves into a wreath for the dead President's tomb. The central thought is of death, but around this he curiously twines, first the early blooming lilacs which the poet may have plucked the day the dark shadow came; next the song of the hermit thrush, the most

sweet and solemn of all our songsters, heard at twilight in the dusky cedars; and with these the evening star, which, as many may remember, night after night in the early part of that eventful spring, hung low in the west with unusual and tender brightness. These are the premises whence he starts his solemn chant.

The attitude, therefore, is not that of being bowed down and weeping hopeless tears, but of singing a commemorative hymn, in which the voices of Nature join, and fits that exalted condition of the soul which serious events and the presence of death induce. There are no words of mere eulogy, no statistics, and no story or narrative; but there are pictures, processions, and a strange mingling of darkness and light, of grief and triumph; now the voice of the bird, or the drooping lustrous star, or the sombre thought of death; then a recurrence to the open scenery of the land as it lay in the April light, "the summer approaching with richness and the fields all busy with labor," presently dashed in upon by a spectral vision of armies with torn and bloody battle-flags—and again, of the white skeletons of young men long afterward strewing the ground. Hence the piece has little or nothing of the character of the usual productions on such occasions. It is dramatic; yet there is no development of plot, but a constant interplay, a turning and returning of images and sentiments.

The poet breaks a sprig of lilac from the bush in the door-yard—the dark cloud falls on the land—the long funeral sets out—and then the apostrophe:

"Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
Through day and night, with the great cloud darkening the land,
With the pomp of the inloop'd flags, with the cities draped in black,
With the show of the States themselves, as of crape-veiled women, standing,

With processions long and winding, and the flambeaus of the night,
With the countless torches lit—with the silent sea of faces, and the unbared heads,
With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and the sombre faces,
With dirges through the night, with the thousand voices rising strong and solemn;
With all the mournful voices of the dirges, pour'd around the coffin,
The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs—Where amid these you journey,
With the tolling, tolling bells' perpetual clang;
Here! coffin that slowly passes,
I give you my sprig of lilac.

(Nor for you, for one alone;
Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring;
For fresh as the morning—thus would I chant a song for you, O sane and sacred death.

All over bouquets of roses,
O death! I cover you over with roses and early lilies;
But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,
Copious, I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes;
With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,
For you and the coffins all of you, O death.)"

Then the strain goes on:

"O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?
And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?
And what shall my perfume be, for the grave of him I love?

Sea-winds, blown from east and west,
Blown from the eastern sea, and blown from the western sea, till there on the prairies meeting:
These, and with these, and the breath of my chant,
I perfume the grave of him I love."

The poem reaches, perhaps, its height in the matchless invocation to Death:

"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.

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious;
And for love, sweet love—but praise! O praise and praise,
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding Death.

Dark Mother, always gliding near, with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee—I glorify thee above all;
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come unfalteringly.

Approach, encompassing Death—strong Deliveress!
When it is so—when thou hast taken them, I joyously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving, floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the blood of thy bliss, O Death.

From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose, saluting thee—adornments and feastings for thee;
And the sights of the open landscape, and the high-spread sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.

The night, in silence, under many a star;
The ocean shore, and the husky whispering wave, whose voice I know;
And the soul turning to thee, O vast and well-veil'd Death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee."

IV.

Leaving this most remarkable piece, and leaving much else in the book that might be elaborated, the dominant character of Drum-Taps, to my apprehension, resides in that part of the spirit pervading the whole, which is shown

more definitely in such pieces as *Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night; A March in the Ranks, hard-pressed; As Toilsome I Wandered Virginia's Woods;* the *Dirge for Two Veterans;* the *Hymn of Dead Soldiers; A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Grey and Dim;* and *Pensive I Heard the Mother of All.* This last piece I cannot refrain from quoting, as in it is contained the characteristic purport I have alluded to:

"Pensive, on her dead gazing, I heard the Mother of All,
Desperate, on the torn bodies, on the forms covering the battle-fields gazing;
As she call'd to her earth with mournful voice while she stalk'd:
Absorb them well, O my earth, she cried—I charge you, lose not my [illegible];
And you streams, absorb them well, taking their dear blood;
And you local spots, and you airs that swim above lightly,
And all you essences of soil and growth—and you, O my rivers' depths;
And you mountain sides—and the woods where my dear children's blood, trickling, redden'd;
And you trees, down in your roots, to bequeath to all future trees,
My dead absorb—my young men's beautiful bodies absorb—and their precious, precious, precious blood;
Which holding in trust for me, faithfully back again give me, many a year hence,
In unseen essence and odor of surface and grass, centuries hence;
In blowing airs from the fields, back again give me my darlings—give my immortal heroes;
Exhale me them centuries hence—breathe me their breath—let not an atom be lost;
O years and graves! O air and soil! O my dead, an aroma sweet!
Exhale them perennial, sweet death, years, centuries hence."

These pieces, putting in form that highest and widest, yet unwritten, part of the war necessarily passing away with

the present generation, but immeasurably precious as a reminiscence to all future generations—the quality and fresh earnestness of the million volunteers of 1861–'5, from the families of the common people, with their youth, their general personal health and beauty—the fact that they were mainly farmers' sons of pure American stock—followed by the appaling number of their deaths in battle and from exertion and exposure—those myriad unknown deaths and burials, many never identified, but here chanted in a strain of sadness, yet exultation, that will live while the land has memory—these, I say, form the crowning trait of this important part of Walt Whitman's works.

Indeed I venture to predict that what is here contributed in DRUM-TAPS will gradually and in due time come to be accepted as the vital and distinguishing memento through literature of the late war, and its strongest tie with the ages to come. Those ages will leave the volumes of the historian and the mountains of official reports, and all the details of military tactics and manœuvres, and will dwell with emotion amid what this man, from his deepest heart, and out of the sight of his own eyes, has sung of that terrible contest.

No other opportunity but a vast and ensanguined war, and a personal movement in it, like Walt Whitman's, as consoler, confidant, and most loving support to hundreds of wounded and dying men, most of them very young, could have drawn, in that unprecedented manner, on the soul, for sympathy and pity. But his soul met these demands, and fully responded to them. Nor has poetry, nor has art in any of its departments, ever received, and stamped in an enduring form, such tenderness for suffering, such

surpassing love, such human adhesion to human sons and brethren, so close, so untiring, as are by this man put in DRUM-TAPS. The mere literary part of their construction, admirable as it is, sinks comparatively into nothing. A new emergency is met by a new support, its equal. Hymns and rapt psalms of battle and death chant themselves not to the ear or intellect, neither of which can help us now, but to the highest perennial quality of the spirit. In the midst of the wailing is the tone of the triumphal. The heart bleeds strange, sad, yet singularly blissful drops. Out of the fearful overwhelming facts of the anguish, the maiming, and the mutilation—out of sights of fields of blackening corpses —our own brothers', children's, well-known friends', most unnatural deaths, we are made to rise, as if by the force of heavenly spells, by a capacity that had lain slumbering unsuspected within us, for such an immense exigency, to moods of the absolute, the universal, the ecstatic.

Yet all so common, so near! The great truth that the men in the ranks were the real heroes of the war—that they bore the heat and burden, and won the prize—is the marrow of the poems. Above all, he sings the lost. Each of those heroes, though dead and unnamed, has here his fit memorial. The young saltling from bleak Cape Cod, the Philadelphia machinist, the farmer's son of Michigan or Illinois or Ohio—each sent down by fate to the black mystery of dreaded death—for each the mother's, sister's tears, the family dismay—for each the hurried trench upon the field at night by truce permitted; yet here, by this man's art, from the trench raised, redeemed, bathed with a love, a brightness warmer and clearer than the sun's—with monument for every one as high, as strong as poesy can

ever build! Such for the dead volunteer—such from Walt Whitman for the fallen soldier of the ranks, the unknown demigod, the ardent boy of 1861 and '2 and '3!

Sure as the ages roll, America will not forget this service. Sweeter and deeper, as time continues, will these powerful songs approve themselves, and the precious wealth, the country's own, richer than California's gold, deposited in them. And when the angry hatreds of the struggle shall have passed away and become altogether forgotten—when our nation, thoroughly fused, and after a long career, forms really a history for itself—and when the venerableness of time, and of more than one generation, shall have furnished a retrospective vista through which these pieces can be gazed on, and read, and felt, to the fathom of themselves—I see how the quality resident in them, looming through the haze of the past, full of the inexpressible associations of that strange, sad war, will have effects on such American, Southern or Northern, who reads, or hears them read, as never yet have been surpassed by bard, or work of art, on man.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES.

I.

Nearly five years have elapsed since the foregoing Notes were put to press, bringing their statements down to the latter part of 1866. The current year, 1871, introduces a still newer and fuller edition of Walt Whitman's poetry, and also a prose essay, Democratic Vistas, in pamphlet form, on critical, literary, and political topics. I have the author's express authority for averring that this, the fifth edition of Leaves of Grass, is the final one. In it the consecutive order is changed and improved from the volume of 1866-7 which had formed the basis of the preceding essay; yet the new one seems to me so essentially the same, as far as it includes the old pieces, the trunk of the book, that after a careful examination I reiterate and apply the previous Notes, as far as they go, to this last and permanent edition of 1871-2.

Leaves of Grass now open with several pages of *Inscriptions*, instead of the single piece copied on page 23 of these Notes, which is altered somewhat, but most of it retained. The Inscriptions form a regular and varied overture, of which the last or closing passage apostrophizes the cause of Liberty or progress:

Thou orb of many orbs!
Thou seething principle! Thou well-kept, latent germ! Thou centre!
Around the idea of thee the strange sad war revolving,
With all its angry and vehement play of causes,
(With yet unknown results to come, for thrice a thousand years,)
These recitatives for thee—my Book and the War are one,
Merged in its spirit I and mine—as the contest hinged on thee,
As a wheel on its axis turns, this Book, unwitting to itself,
Around the Idea of thee.

And in several other poems the idea that the late Secession War furnishes the historical basis or event on which the whole work stands is in like manner presented.

All the old clusters and single pieces, *Starting from Paumanok*, *Walt Whitman*, *Children of Adam*, *Calamus*, *Salut au Monde*, *The Broad-Axe*, *The Open Road*, *Song of Occupations*, *Drum-Taps*, *Blue Ontario's Shore*, *Pioneers*, *Songs of Parting*, &c., &c., are duly marshaled here, with some new combinations, *Bathed in War's Perfume*, *Songs of Insurrection*, interpersed every now and then with lesser or larger collections of *Leaves of Grass*.

II.

The additional section or cluster, PASSAGE TO INDIA, takes its name from the leading piece. On the title-page are these lines:

> Gliding o'er all, through all,
> Through Nature, Time, and Space,
> As a Ship on the waters advancing,
> The Voyage of the Soul—not Life alone,
> Death—many Deaths, I sing.

The opening piece itself, *Passage to India*, combining the qualities of lyric, epic, and hymn, takes for its basis the facts of exploration and the principal modern engineering works, the electric telegraph, the Suez canal, and the Pacific railroad, and celebrates that immemorial search after the route to India which has played a leading part in history, and caused the discovery of America.

> A worship new, I sing;
> You captains, voyagers, explorers, yours!
> You engineers! you architects, machinists, yours!
> You, not for trade or transportation only,
> But in God's name, and for thy sake, O soul.

But while chanting these, the poet demands—and this is his real purport—an exploration, a voyage toward another

India, the metaphysical one, the mother of transcendentalism, and source of Bibles:

> Passage indeed, O soul, to primal thought!
> Not lands and seas alone—thy own clear freshness,
> The young maturity of brood and bloom;
> To realms of budding bibles.
>
> O soul, repressless, I with thee, and thou with me,
> Thy circumnavigation of the world begin;
> Of man, the voyage of his mind's return,
> To reason's early paradise,
> Back, back to wisdom's birth, to innocent intuitions,
> Again with fair Creation.

In the latter part of the piece are several stanzas apostrophizing Deity, in figures entirely new to European theology:

> Reckoning ahead, O soul, when thou, the time achiev'd,
> (The seas all cross'd, weather'd the capes, the voyage done,)
> Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attain'd,
> As, fill'd with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found,
> The Younger melts in fondness in his arms.

Then follow various distinct collections or pieces, directly or indirectly relating to Death: *Proud Music of the Storm*, *Ashes of Soldiers*, *President Lincoln's Burial Hymn*, *Poem of Joys*, *the Square Deific*, *Whispers of Heavenly Death*, *Sea-Shore Memories*, some *Leaves of Grass*, ending with a little collection called *Finale to the Shore*.

The amount of the author's design in this crowning part or collection as a whole, is perhaps conveyed by these lines:

> Through Space and Time fused in a chant, and the flowing, eternal Identity,
> To Nature, encompassing these, encompassing God—to the joyous electric All,
> To the sense of Death—and accepting, exulting in Death, in its turn, the same as life,
> The entrance of Man I sing.

In other words, the entire volume, as it now stands, with

the pieces of PASSAGE TO IND'A included, is an expression, more decidedly than before, of that combination in which Death and the Unknown are as essential and important to the author's plan of a complete human Personality as Life and the Known.

III.

There is probably no analogous case in the history of literature where the result of a profound artistic plan or conception—first launched forth, and briefly, yet sufficiently exemplified, as in the small volume of the LEAVES of 1855, taking for foundation Man in his fulness of blood, power, amativeness, health, physique, and as standing in the midst of the objective world—a plan so steadily adhered to, yet so audaciously and freely built out of and upon, and with such epic consistency, after that start of 1855, developed in '57, '60, and '66, in successive moral, esthetic, and religious stages, each absorbing the previous ones, but striding on far ahead of them—gradually made more and more emotional, meditative, patriotic—vitalized, heated to almost unbearable fervency by the author's personal part in the war, composing his songs of it in actual contact with its subjects, on the very field, or surrounded by the wounded "after the battle brought in"—chanting undismayed the strong chant of the Inseparable Union, amid the vehement crises and stormy dangers of the period; and so gradually arriving at the completed book of 1871-2, and crowning all in it with the electric and solemn poems of death and immortality—has so justified, and beyond measure justified, its first ambitious plan and promise.*

* Yet a very high authority—perhaps the highest literary authority of the land—would appear to hold a different opinion. The first and partial appearance of LEAVES OF GRASS, in 1855, brought out the following letter, alluded to on pages 16 and 19, preceding. I find it on file in the *N. Y. Tribune* of that period:

CONCORD, MASS., *July* 21, 1855.

DEAR SIR—I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of

The history of the book, thus considered, not only resembles and tallies, in certain respects, the development of the great System of Idealistic Philosophy in Germany, by the "illustrious four"—except that the development of LEAVES OF GRASS has been carried on within the region of a single mind,—but it is to be demonstrated, by study and comparison, that the same theory of the essential identity of the spiritual and material worlds, the shows of nature, the progress of civilization, the play of passions, the human intellect, and the relations between it and the concrete universe, which Kant prepared the way for, and Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel have given expression and statement in their system of transcendental Metaphysics—this author

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"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 seemed 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 postoffice. I wish to see my benefactor, and have felt much like striking my tasks and visiting New York to pay you my respects.

WALT WHITMAN. R. W. EMERSON.

Per contra. I read in the current journals—January, 1871—reports of a lecture delivered at Detroit, Michigan, in which Mr. Emerson is reported to have said:

"Walt Whitman in his first efforts gave very high promise, but he has not fulfilled it since."

It will be for the future to decide which of these is the lasting judgment and more acute criticism.

has, with equal entirety, expressed and stated in LEAVES OF GRASS, from a poet's point of view—singing afresh, out of it, the song of the visible and invisible worlds—renewing, reconstructing, consistently with the modern genius, and deeper and wider than ever, the promises of immortality—endowing the elements of faith and pride with a vigor and *ensemble* before unknown—and furnishing to the measureless audience of humanity the only great Imaginative Work it yet possesses, in which the objective universe and Man, his soul, are observed and outlined, and the theory of Human Personality and Character projected, from the anterior and hidden, but absolute background, of that magnificent System. For as Walt Whitman now unfolds his full design, it is clear that after his enormous materialism, his amativeness, and his intense realistic qualities, and his advancing over everything else, as we supposed, of the animal body and its appetites, he uses them mainly as doors or foundations for something else, and is finally the poet of the absoluteness of Spirit.

> "There is nothing but Immortality,
> The exquisite scheme is all for it;
> And Life and Death are for it."

Is it to be wondered at that he is not understood when read as other books are read? In the usual sense, he has no plot; but in the largest sense he includes all plots. While the objects and events of the universe, as affecting the human spirit and identity, are treated by other writers from absolute standards, they are invariably treated by him as only relative and evanescent, and on the theory that—

> "The real something has yet to be known."

He sings always spiritual elevations. The boot-black, the beggar, the old woman, whom other writers mention most in irony or burlesque, he sees as immortal souls, and includes them in his poems. Depicting Man under passional, corporeal, and scientific conditions, and with an exhaustless

wealth of illustration from the shows, forms, colors, identities, of the objective world, his chief characteristics of treatment, an unprecedented Adhesiveness and Sublimity, mainly with reference to the future, envelop all his different parts like light, and comprehend and bind them into a whole. With his copiousness and luxuriance, and his endless processions, no other poet is so severe; with vastest complications, none else is so simple. Tropes, conceits, he never uses. His incidents are few, though when and wherever brought in they tell like ordnance in battle. He always produces or suggests dilation; seldom the limited; never the petty. As Johnson said of Milton: "His genius can hew a colossus out of a rock, but cannot carve heads on cherry-stones."

The Book, in all respects, as completed, is peculiarly the song of this Nineteenth Century of ours—the most important period, perhaps, in known history. It is true the rapid and manifold advances, improvements, discoveries, and weighty political and historical changes of the century, covering so wide a field, and in such whelming variety over the civilized world, are impossible to be narrated in a Poem. But what can be absorbed and realized by one Personality in the midst of our age, fully aware of its important events and fully accepting them, and radiating the spirit of them, Walt Whitman, to all intents and purposes, has put in this book.

That part of it definitely put in words in the piece *All is Truth* is perhaps the hardest puzzle, and will longest continue to excite repugnance. For it is not mere optimism that underlies the mind of the author. His conclusion, after examining the contradictions of the universe, as indicated by the avowal—

> "All is truth without exception,
> And henceforth I will go celebrate anything I see or am,
> And sing and laugh, and deny nothing"—

defies criticism—as indeed much of the work does—and

opens unpleasing possibilities. Considered in this respect, the book, like the world itself, is a contradictory mixture, a complication—a magazine, or arsenal, whence not the good only will get weapons, but doubtless the bad also. It is every way likely that many of the passages of it will be perverted, misconstrued to evil, and will perhaps be made the text for avowed impurity.

IV.

With respect to *Children of Adam*, and the occasional vein of thought and allusion throughout the whole book on which so much stress has been laid—in addition to what has been said in preceding pages 27, 28 and 29 –I copy from "*A Woman's Estimate of Walt Whitman*," written in England, in letters to W. M. Rossetti, (see page 5 :)

Extracts.

.....I shall quite fearlessly accept your kind offer of the loan of a complete edition, certain that great and divinely beautiful nature has not, could not infuse any poison into the wine he has poured out for us. And as for what you specially allude to, who so well able to bear it—I will say, to judge wisely of it—as one who, having been a happy wife and mother, has learned to accept all things with tenderness, to feel a sacredness in all? Perhaps Walt Whitman has forgotten—or, through some theory in his head, has overridden—the truth that our instincts are beautiful facts of nature, as well as our bodies; and that we have a strong instinct of silence about some things.

.....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? What! is it all so ignoble, so base, that it will not bear the honest light of speech from lips so gifted with "the divine power to use words?" Then what hateful, bitter humiliation for her, to have to give herself up to the reality! Do you think there is ever a bride who

does not taste more or less this bitterness in her cup? But who put it there? It must surely be man's fault, not God's, that she has to say to herself, "Soul, look another way—you have no part in this. Motherhood is beautiful, fatherhood is beautiful; but the dawn of fatherhood and motherhood is not beautiful." Do they really think that God is ashamed of what he has made and appointed? And, if not, surely it is somewhat superfluous that they should undertake to be so for him.

"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 path 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: light of a clear, strong faith in God, of an unfathomably deep and tender love for humanity,—light shed out of a soul that is "possessed of itself."

> "Natural life of me faithfully praising things,
> Corroborating for ever the triumph of things."

Now silence may brood again; but lovingly, happily, as protecting what is beautiful, not as hiding what is unbeautiful; consciously enfolding a sweet and sacred mystery—august even as the mystery of Death, the dawn as the setting; kindred grandeurs, which to eyes that are opened shed a hallowing beauty on all that surrounds and preludes them.

"O vast and well-veiled Death!
"O the beautiful touch of Death, soothing and benumbing a few moments, for reasons!"

He who can thus look with fearlessness at the beauty of Death may well dare to teach us to look with fearless, untroubled eyes at the perfect beauty of Love in all its appointed realizations. Now none need turn away their thoughts with pain or shame; though only lovers and poets may say what they will,—the lover to his own, the poet to all, because all are in a sense his own. None need fear that this will be harmful to the woman. How should there be such a flaw in the scheme of creation that, for the two with whom there is no complete life, save in closest

sympathy, perfect union, what is natural and happy for the one should be baneful to the other? The utmost faithful freedom of speech, such as there is in these poems, creates in her no thought or feeling that shuns the light of heaven, none that are not as innocent and serenely fair as the flowers that grow; would lead, not to harm, but to such deep and tender affection as makes harm or the thought of harm simply impo sible.

This is so, though it is little understood or realized by men. Wives and mothers will learn through this poet that there is rejoicing grandeur and beauty there wherein their hearts have so longed to find it; where foolish men, traitors to themselves, poorly comprehending the grandeur of their own or the beauty of a woman's nature, have taken such pains to make her believe there was none,—nothing but miserable discrepancy.

V.

Detractors and the coldly correct have charged—and the charge will probably continue—that this poet is wild, irregular, and sometimes raves. In certain moods, I admit, he abandons all conventional and merely literary ties—and indeed all ties except those of the ecstasy of the moment; but the sentences then uttered have deepest meaning, and are never lost to his firm control. "Whatever man," says Plato, "altogether untouched with the Muse's frenzy, attempts to enter the palace of Poesy and achieve works therein, neither that man nor his works will ever attain perfection; but they are destined, for all their cold propriety, to be eclipsed by the utterances of some inspired madman."

But Walt Whitman is no madman; rather, the sanest of any. After all, he but continues the divine and eternal dynasty of poets, and in the direct line. The old power, virtue, expansion, grafted on modernness, are what he stands for. Aristotle said the real intention of Homer's verse was doubtless to construct strong and hardy models for the state, for purposes of war. In Leaves of Grass, as in Democratic Vistas, and their author himself, I find the universal basis of flesh and blood, chemical, with iron and lime, the same elements as everywhere, yet advanced by many stages, entirely modern, with reference to peace and not war, with a

moral, religious, interior Democracy, stronger, more generous than ever, for service for individual character in the New World.

For to finish the criticism, it is as an expression and faithful reflex, under such modern and democratic conditions, of a single complete Human Being—that beginning and end of everything, an embodied Soul—that LEAVES OF GRASS touches each reader, and comes home to him or her most closely. Hitherto, the great poets—as Homer, Æschylus, Shakespeare—borne on the wings of their genius, (see extract from St.-Beuve, page 8,) have narrated, sung incidents, woven the passions, with complicated plots of war, love, epics, tragedies, and the like. But in Walt Whitman's pages it is, in short, only himself, a Man, and type of a New Race of men, that the author gives us. This is the spinal marrow of the various poems, and, whatever the difference of theme, makes them essentially one. And from this, the statement of the *personality* of the man himself, in my mind, becomes of first importance.

In such personality—by which I mean also his life, character, attitude toward and amid his times, his country, and the events thereof—his behavior, faults, as well as merits—I find lessons fully as significant, in their way, as those afforded by his writings. I say *faults;* for upon due analysis, we discover every case of marked and resplendent individualism to be a composition, a paradox. Can there be strong lights without shades—mountain peaks without intervening chasms? Walt Whitman himself has warned me that my essay was seriously deficient in not containing this distinct admission applied to him. "My friends," he said, "are blind to the real devils that are in me. My enemies discover fancy ones. I perceive in clear moments that my work is not the accomplishment of perfections, but destined, I hope, always to arouse an unquenchable feeling and ardor for them. It is out of struggle and turmoil I have written."

To the objection, since the appearance of the first edition

of these Notes, against my giving space in them to a personal portraiture and biography of the poet in his own lifetime, I therefore oppose an emphatic feeling, the result of much deliberation and the experience of several years, that in the preceding pages I have not said too much on those particulars, but far too little. It is mostly as a physical being, a practical citizen, and his combination of qualities as such in the Nineteenth Century and in the United States, that I find him, to use Carlyle's phrase, "A man furnished for the highest of all enterprises—that of being the poet of his age." And if that age, or if future ages, will not understand LEAVES OF GRASS, or will understand them with difficulty, my conviction is that it is mainly because there exists no true and complete, but either an entirely defective or incredibly false and vicious conception, or want of conception, in society, of the author personally. Indeed, I doubt whether Walt Whitman's writings can be realized, except through first knowing or getting a true notion of the corporeal man and his manners, and coming in *rapport* with them. His form, physiognomy, gait, vocalization—the very touch of him, and the glance of his eyes upon you—all have closely to do with the subtlest meaning of his verse. His manners exemplify his book. Even a knowledge of his ancestry, with the theory he entertains, and which is justified by his own case, of what he calls "the best motherhood," would light up many portions of his poems.

[The ancestry of Walt Whitman, on both the paternal and maternal sides, shows him to have come of good stock, in a sense which corresponds with the theory of his book, and his own character. They appear, as I trace them back through four or five generations, (see pages 77, '8, '9, preceding,) to have been sufficiently provided with the world's gear; gave their children an education above the average, kept a good table, sustained the hospitalities, decorums, and an excellent social reputation in the county, yet were often of marked individuality. If space permitted, I should con-

sider some of the men worthy special description; and still more some of the women. His great-grandmother on the paternal side, for instance, was a large swarthy woman, who lived to a very old age. She smoked tobacco, rode on horseback like a man, managed the most vicious horse, and, becoming a widow in later life, went forth every day over her farm-lands, frequently in the saddle, directing the labor of her slaves, with language in which, on exciting occasions, oaths were not spared. The two immediate grandmothers of the poet were, in the best sense, superior women. The maternal one was a Friend, or Quakeress, of sweet, sensible character, housewifely proclivities, and deeply intuitive and spiritual. The other, (Hannah Brush, before marriage,) was an equally noble, but stronger character, lived to be very old, had quite a family of sons, was a natural lady, was in early life a school-mistress, and had great solidity of mind. The poet himself makes much of the women of his ancestry. He never speaks of his own mother but as "dear mother," his face flush with yearning and pride.]

VI.

The man, indeed, personally as much as in his book, foreruns the future. Tried by the conventional standards of the London or Boston of to-day, as his words are a stumbling-block, he himself is an offence. He is too free, too original, too acceptive of evil as well as good, of the flesh as well as the mind, and too scornfully ignores their whole category of priggish godlings and kinks. His full-bloodedness and enormous sense of objective nature would doubtless overwhelm and crush him, were they not resisted and counterbalanced by his equally enormous egoism, his subjective and soul quality—both together radiating constantly from his presence, in room, car, or street. This is what renders him at times stronger than they can stand, to the routine, sophisticated classes; while the same makes him *take* like a charm with illiterate people, farmers, workingmen, sailors, and also healthy women, the very young and old, and with high-born foreigners—a case where extremes meet. The

sight of him walking the sidewalk—his accustomed slow, yet alert and cheery gait, in New York, Brooklyn, New Orleans, or Washington, ought to be the best preparation for the reading of his LEAVES, or VISTAS, and effectually disarm, in advance, the objections that have been got up against him.

[An eye-witness and participator related, in a letter from Washington, to a friend, the following anecdote of Abraham Lincoln, (alluded to on page 85 :)

"It was in the winter-time, I think in '64, I went up to the White House with a friend of mine, an M. C., who had some business with the President. He had gone out, so we didn't stop; but coming down stairs, quite near the door, we met the President coming in, and we stept back into the East Room, and stood near the front windows, where my friend had a confab with him. It didn't last more than three or four minutes; but there was something about a letter which my friend had handed the President, and Mr. Lincoln had read it, and was holding it in his hand like one thinking it over, and looking out of the window, when Walt Whitman went by, on the walk in front, quite slow, with his hands in the breast-pockets of his overcoat, and a sizeable felt hat on, and his head pretty well up, just as I have often seen him on Broadway. Mr. Lincoln asked who that was, or something of the kind. I spoke up, mentioning the name, Walt Whitman, and said he was the author of LEAVES OF GRASS, etc. Mr. Lincoln didn't say anything, but took a good look, till Whitman was quite gone by. Then he says—(I can't give you his way of saying it, but it was quite emphatic and odd)—'Well,' he says, '*he* looks like a MAN.' He said it pretty loud, but in a sort of absent way, and with the emphasis on the words I have underscored. He didn't say any more, but begun to talk again about the letter; and in a minute or so we went off."]

VII.

A more definite statement of the contradictory position

of this writer, at the present time, seems demanded before I close. By special and limited circles, literary, social, and political, and by individuals, women as well as men, here and there in the United States, and in England, Walt Whitman, it cannot be denied, is read and rated, to-day, not only as one of the highest class of poets and philosophers, but as, for modern purposes, perhaps, the highest of all poets and philosophers. Nevertheless, the bulk of the public do not accept him, and a majority of "critics" and editors superciliously deny him. The manuscript of *Passage to India* was refused by the monthly magazines successively in New York, Boston, San Francisco, and London. At large, a vague but current notion pervades that he is an obscene writer. By many persons, including literary people, he is reckoned a mere oddity, or perhaps an affectation, or suspiciously coarse and low. Up to this hour, the publishers will not publish him, nor "the trade," in general, sell him over their counters.

The future will hardly realize the calumnies and the utter malignance and obstinacy directed against him, in his lifetime, from certain quarters. As clerk in Washington, one Head of Department summarily turns him out, (1865,) saying, when remonstrated with by the gentleman mentioned on page 94, "If the President himself directed me to put the author of LEAVES OF GRASS back in his place, I would resign sooner than do it;"—and afterward, (1869,) he is subjected, in another Department, to trains of dastardly official insolence by a dignitary of equal rank, from whom he narrowly escapes the same fate.

It seems to me, among the chiefest points of the man, that through all these years of general misunderstanding, mixed with positive and negative insult, he steadily and good-naturedly keeps on, works at his Book, and finishes it, without being depressed or discomfited. ["Possessing singular personal magnetism, and frequently beloved at sight," says a notice of him lately in a journal, "yet Walt Whitman's nonchalance, and a certain silent defiance, both

in his poetry and appearance, have long laid him open to caricature and sarcastic criticism. Then there have been imputations of a virulent description, such as ignorance, drunkenness, and lust, to which mental aberration and moral obliquity have been strenuously added. Very little, however, do these charges trouble the subject of them. 'In early years,' said Mr. Whitman, lately in conversation, 'I murmured much at the fate of being misrepresented and misunderstood—at the lies of enemies, and still more the complacent fatuity of those I loved. But I see now that it is no detriment to a hardy character, but is perhaps the inevitable price of freedom and a vigorous training and growth; and that even slanders mean something to every real student of himself, and, as it were, betray to the commander of the fort where his embankments are openest to the enemy, and most need strengthening and the guard.'"]

VIII.

Not unaware that my course in this sketch is perhaps exceptional, I am determined to convey sufficient clues, in the spirit of the author himself, to the homeliest relations or sources of LEAVES OF GRASS as primarily the outgrowth of a corporeal, eating and drinking man, and even his domestic habits, and personal form and physiognomy.

EXTRACTS.

From the Rochester Gazette, N. Y., March 7, 1868.

.....I present Walt Whitman, then, as a man now well in his forty-ninth year, tall and strongly built, with a profuse gray beard, which at first sight gives him an older appearance; of slow movement and erect figure; of manners always simple, full of cheer and courtesy, a moderate talker, and, contrary to the general opinion, altogether free from eccentricity. The portraits and photographs in existence fail in giving the real life expression. His serene gray eyes, and the copiousness of hair, moustache, eyebrows and beard, affording ample silvery fringe to his face of faint scarlet, make up a large part of its individuality. I have heard

physiognomists say that no face could contain more alertness, combined with more calmness; and he has occasionally, in repose, a look I once heard in a description of him, as a man "wandering out of himself, and roaming silently over the whole earth."

From the Washington Sunday Chronicle, May 9, 1869.

.....On Pennsylvania avenue or Seventh or Fourteenth street, or perhaps, of a Sunday, along the surburban roads toward Rock creek, or across on Arlington Heights, or up the shores of the Potomac, you will meet moving along at a firm but moderate pace, a robust figure, six feet high, costumed in blue or gray, with drab hat, broad shirt collar, gray white beard, full and curly, face like a red apple, blue eyes, and a look of animal health more indicative of hunting or boating than the department office or author's desk. Indeed, the subject of our item, in his verse, his manners, and even in his philosophy, evidently draws from, and has reference to, the influences of sea and sky, and woods and prairies, with their laws, and man in his relations to them; while neither the conventional parlor nor library has cast its spells upon him.

Letter from Washington, November 28, 1870.

.....You ask for some particulars of my friend Whitman. You know I first fell in with him years ago in the army; we then lived awhile in the same tent, and now I occupy the adjoining room to his. I can, therefore, gratify your curiosity. He is a large loooking man. While in the market the other day with a party of us, we were all weighed; his weight was 200 pounds. But I will just start with him like with the day. He is fond of the sun, and at this season, soon as it is well up, shining in his room, he is out in its beams for a cold-water bath, with hand and sponge, after a brisk use of the flesh-brush. Then blithely singing—his singing often pleasantly wakes me—he proceeds to finish his toilet, about which he is quite particular. Then forth for a walk in the open air, or perhaps some short exercise in the gymnasium. Then to breakfast—no sipping and nibbling—he demolishes meat, eggs, rolls, toast, roast potatoes, coffee, buckwheat cakes, at a terrible rate. Then walking moderately to his desk in the Attorney General's office—a pleasant desk, with large, south window at his left, looking away down the Potomac, and across to Virginia on one side.

He is at present in first-rate bodily health. Of his mind you must judge from his writings, as I have sent them to you. He is not what is called ceremonious or polite, but I have noticed invariably kind and tolerant with children, servants, laborers, and the illiterate. He gives freely to the poor, according to his means. He can be freezing in manner, and knows how to fend off bores, though really the most affectionate of men. For instance, I saw him, was with him, the other day, meeting at the railroad depot, after long separation, a family group, to all the members

of whom he was attached through the tenderest former associations, and some he had known from childhood, interchanging great hearty kisses with each, the boys and men as well as the girls and women.

Sometimes he and I only—sometimes a larger party of us—go off on rambles of several miles out in the country, or over the hills; sometimes we go nights, when the moon is fine. On such occasions he contributes his part to the general fun. You might hear his voice, half in sport, declaiming some passage from a poem or play; and his song or laugh about as often as any, sounding in the open air.

From Washington letter, N. Y. Evening Mail, October 27, 1870.

.....The papers here have all paragraphed Walt Whitman's return to town and to his desk in the Attorney General's office, after quite a long vacation. His figure is daily to be seen here moving around in the open air, especially fine mornings and evenings, observing, listening to, or sociably talking with all sorts of people, policemen, drivers, marketmen, old women, the blacks, or dignitaries; or, perhaps, giving some small alms to beggars, the maimed, or organ-grinders; or stopping to caress little children, of whom he is very fond. He takes deep interest in all the news, foreign and domestic. At the commencement of the present war in Europe he was strongly German, but is now the ardent friend of the French, and enthusiastically supports them and their Republic. Here at home he goes for general amnesty and oblivion to secessionists; he speaks sharply of the tendency of the Republican party to concentrate all power (as he says) in Congress, and make its legislation absolutely sovereign, as against the equal claims, in their spheres, of the Presidency, the Judiciary, and the single States.

Altogether, perhaps, "the good, gray poet" is rightly located here. Our wide spaces, great edifices, the breadth of our landscape, the ample vistas, the splendor of our skies, night and day, with the national character, the memories of Washington and Lincoln, and others that might be named, make our city, above all others, the one where he fitly belongs.

Walt Whitman is now in his fifty-second year, hearty and blooming, tall, with white beard and long hair. The older he gets the more cheerful and gay-hearted he grows.