

hood. Up to 1855 he had been known, as far as he was known at all, simply as a carpenter-printer of no especial steadiness. In 1855, however, appeared his first and most favored book, *Leaves of Grass*, a volume of rhapsodical poems, always without rhyme, sometimes without rhythm, and sometimes also, it must be said, without reason. The poems dealt especially with the interests involved in American life and the progress of the time.

The book called forth a great amount of praise and a still greater amount of blame. Let it be set down here in plain terms that some of his verse, and many passages in *Leaves of Grass*, are simply obscene. He says things here which sometimes come into everyone's head, when, on occasion, the lowness of our animal nature discolors the purity of our thought but which, among decent persons, are wisely banished off-hand. In quantity this offensive verse exceeds the voluptuous passages in Tennyson's *Vivien*, but its bulk is much smaller than the kindred contributions of Byron and Swinburne.

No subject was too small for Whitman. Identifying the soul of man as one with its surroundings, he considered the cesspool as worthy a subject for his muse as the flower-garden. Pantheist is he to the backbone; a nature-worshipper, seeing God everywhere—God in all, even the meanest thing, a "God-intoxicated man" more truly than Spinoza. He bows before good and evil as integral and correlative elements in the universal scheme of things, all going, as Hegel demonstrates, by the principle of identity of the contraries.

Those who did not object to the nudity of the poems were offended at the unconventional form in which they were cast; and some were shocked honestly at the poems themselves. He seemed to imagine that as poetic form does not, like reading and writing, come by nature, it must be artificial and bad, whereas form is of the essence of every art, and art is the expression of the beautiful idea which underlies nature and is disengaged by the purged vision of only the chosen and the gifted.

No publisher could be got to handle *Leaves of Grass*. The first edition of this book, Whitman set up and printed himself and for thirty years he has been revising and adding to the work. The additions give the book a certain epic

completeness which it entirely wanted when first given to the public.

At the beginning of the war of the rebellion Whitman was living in New York, but his brother George was wounded at Fredericksburg in 1862, and the poet went to the front to nurse him. His intense and continued personal occupation day and night for over two years following in nursing the wounded and the sick, northern and southern alike, resulted in a severe prostration and paralysis at the end of the contest, from which he suffered throughout the remainder of his life. He gave his war experience in two volumes, *Drum Taps* (1865) and *Memo-randa during the War* (1867). These volumes contain many passages as graphic as any in the language.

At the close of the war, Whitman obtained a clerkship in the Department of the Interior at Washington, from which he was dismissed when his superior officer learned that he was the author of *Leaves of Grass*. This high-handed action on the part of a jack-in-office led to a memorable controversy wherein Mr. William O'Connor ably defended the moral purity of Whitman's verse, and bestowed upon the author the title of "The Good Gray Poet." In February, 1873, Whitman had a stroke of paralysis resulting, as has been stated before, from the exposure of his army life, and went to Camden, N. J. where he resided down to the time of his lamented death.

The following is a list of his works with dates of publications:

*Leaves of Grass*, (New York 1855); *Passage to India*, (1870); *After all not to Create only*, (1871); *As Strong as a Bird on Pinions Free*, (1872); *Two Rivulets*, including *Democratic Vistas*, and *Passage to India*, (1873); *Specimen Days and Collect*, (1883); *November Boughs*, (1885); *Sands at Seventy*, (1888). A selection of his poems, by William Rossetti, was published in London 1868. Besides the complete edition of *Leaves of Grass* already mentioned, another edited by Prof. Edward Dowdon, and has since been published in Glasgow, Scotland.

The merits of the American poet whose life I have just traced in scanty outline, have been the subject of a controversy almost as fierce as that which raged about the poems of Browning. His enemies, or rather his opponents, were numerous