

consisted of thirty two poems, the twelve of the first edition and twenty new ones. By this time the plan of his work had taken complete shape in his mind. He saw clearly what he had to do and how it was to be done. The rest of his life has been occupied constructing the edifice upon the lines now traced. The first edition had been laughed and sneered at by the press, the second was received with shouts of execration, so loud indeed, that the publishers becoming alarmed, withdrew from their agreement, and the book went out of print. It does not appear that Walt Whitman was surprised or in any way disturbed by this clamor. At this time he was occupied building moderate priced houses in Brooklyn and selling them as finished. After the collapse of the second edition he went to the extreme eastern end of Long Island and spent three months there entirely alone. I have heard him speak of these three months as the happiest of his life. When he returned to New York his resolution was taken to devote his life to his poetical enterprise, and from that resolution he has never for a moment swerved. It is worth notice here that (unlike such poets as Pope and Byron who repaid their critics with a still severer criticism, and for every taunt received sent back a more bitter taunt) the pieces written during and immediately after the storm of vilification of 1856-57 are (if possible) more imbued with tolerance and charity towards man, and unflinching trust in God than any he had hitherto written. His faith in his mission was not for a moment shaken, his love for mankind not for an instant chilled. The poems composed at this time (such as "Starting from Pamonoek," "Whoever you are Holding me now in hand," and many of the pieces of "Callamus,") make larger claims and are more sympathetic than any he had written before. In 1860 Thayer & Eldridge, of Boston, published the third edition, which contained the thirty-two poems of the second edition and one hundred and twenty-two new ones. The next year the war broke out and the book trade was ruined. Thayer & Eldridge failed, and Leaves of Grass again went out of print. In 1862 Walt Whitman went to the seat of war and devoted himself to nursing, attending, and cheering up the sick and wounded men on the battle-field and in the hospitals. What he was to these wounded, sick and dying soldiers no tongue can tell. It was not so much that he spent all his time and strength caring for them, watching by them, doing all that a sister or mother could do for them—not so much that he amused them or occupied their minds with various devices in their weary hours of waiting for recovery or death, that he read to them, comforted them, prayed with them—not so much that he, who might have been rich and well and enjoying all the good things of life, gave up all these, became poor, spent his days and nights attending fevers and dressing fetid wounds, and at last, worn out, became himself sick for their sakes. It was not so much all these as the passionate affection he felt for them and inspired in them which gave his ministrations a character apart, which made them stand out by themselves, and which made O'Connor (who knew him well at that time) compare him to the Divine Comforter of the Gospels.

Three years of this hospital work changed Walt Whitman from a young to an old man, broke down one of the finest constitutions in the world, and left him, who had been the very type of health and vigor, a half paralyzed semi-invalid for the rest of his life.

The fourth edition of "Leaves of Grass" was published in New York in 1867, and included "Drum Taps" and the poems on the death of Lincoln; the fifth edition was issued in Washington in 1871; the sixth (called the centennial edition) was published by the author, in Camden, N.J., in 1876, and the seventh edition (the completed work as planned by its author twenty seven years ago) has lately been brought out by James R. Osgood & Co. of Boston. (The sale of this edition is at present suspended on account of a notice having been served on the publishers that should they continue to sell it they would be prosecuted under the Massachusetts Act for the suppression of obscene literature.)

At the close of the war Walt Whitman was appointed to a clerkship in the Department of the Interior in Washington. From that position he was shortly afterwards discharged by the secretary, Hon. Mr. Hanlan, for having been the author of "Leaves of Grass." He was at once appointed to an equally good position in the office of the Attorney General

which he held as long as his health permitted. Since 1873 he has lived in Camden, New Jersey. Of late years his health has been better and he has made several quite long journeys, one to the Rocky mountains in 1879, and one to Canada, including the St. Lawrence and Saguenay, in 1880.

Walt Whitman is now sixty-three years old, but at first sight looks much older; he has never been married; he is six feet in height, weighs two hundred pounds; his hair and beard are quite white, his features are large and massive, but so proportioned as not to look heavy; his face is by far the noblest I have ever seen. He walks lame from his paralysis, but for all that his figure is as erect as ever. In manner he is quiet, never gets excited, is always in good humor, and keeps cheery even when sick (as he often is.) He has a good word to say of everyone, never manifests, or seems to have, any ill feeling toward any person or thing. Of those who speak ill of him and of his book, he says, that they are quite right; that from their point of view he and his book are bad, and that from any point of view he himself is not half as good as he should be. Those who come into personal contact with him nearly always like him. He is fond of children and they invariably take to him. He always dresses in very plain clothes, which are often old and even torn, but are always spotlessly clean; this cleanliness is, and always has been, an especial feature of the man; it belongs to his clothes, his person, his eating and drinking, his language, thoughts, and to his moral and spiritual nature. No one can be much with him or read his book long without feeling the strongest assurance of his extreme purity.

In conclusion, a few words about "Leaves of Grass." This is not a book or poem in the usual sense. It is something far more than that, and far less also—far less because it does not contain what is usually meant by poetry or literature—far more because it contains something far more valuable than this. "Leaves of Grass" is a picture of the world from the standpoint of probably the highest spiritual nature that has yet appeared among men. The book is on this account inconceivably valuable to those who can use it, that is to those who can sympathize with its lofty ideals and aspirations, and whose every day life may be influenced by these. To those who cannot enter into its religious exaltation the book seems nonsense and worse than nonsense.

To those who think of reading the book I would say: don't expect to understand it or care for it at first, read it slowly and not long at a time, no previous education will help you to understand it, but if you have the necessary moral qualities in yourself the meaning will come to you at last and you will have gained something which will be to you beyond all price. Do not mind those who say that the book is immoral, irreligious, indecent, if it is so to you be sure that these qualities are in yourself and not in the book, and in that case the proper thing for you to do is to find no fault with others, but to set to work zealously and try, with God's help, to reform yourself.

I have given no extracts from "Leaves of Grass" because they are no use, to know anything at all about this book the whole of it must be read, and that not once only, but many times.

A Minneapolis Song.

"Love me little, love me long,"
Sang the dusty miller
To his wheat art, and his song
Did a raze and thrill her.

Bid me barley hope. Oh, give
Me one grain of comfort;
I would oat on thee and live
Holding on to some fort.

"In your ryes now love looks shine,
There lies cereal pleasure,
Oh! hominy joys are mine,
Filling up my measure."

Came the maiden's corn-fall laugh
At the miller's fawning;
"You can't winnow girls with chaff—
Sir! to you good morning."

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