

BOOK XV

A Song for Occupations

1

A song for 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 display'd 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 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.

If you stand at work in a shop I stand as high as the highest in the  
same shop,

If you bestow gifts on your brother or dearest friend I demand as  
good as your brother or dearest friend,

If your lover, husband, wife, is welcome by day or night, I must be  
personally as welcome,

If you become degraded, criminal, ill, then I become so for your sake,

If you remember your foolish and outlaw'd deeds, do you think I  
cannot remember my own foolish and outlaw'd deeds?

If you carouse at the table I carouse at the opposite side of the table,

If you meet some stranger in the streets and love him or her, why  
I often meet strangers in the street and love them.

Why what have you thought of yourself?

Is it you then that thought yourself less?

Is it you that thought the President greater than you?

Or the rich better off than you? or the educated wiser than you?

(Because you are greasy or pimpled, or were once drunk, or a thief,

Or that you are diseas'd, or rheumatic, or a prostitute,

Or from frivolity or impotence, or that you are no scholar and never  
saw your name in print,

Do you give in that you are any less immortal?)

2

Souls of men and women! it is not you I call unseen, unheard,

untouchable and untouching,  
It is not you I go argue pro and con about, and to settle whether  
you are alive or no,  
I own publicly who you are, if nobody else owns.

Grown, half-grown and babe, of this country and every country,  
in-doors and out-doors, one just as much as the other, I see,  
And all else behind or through them.

The wife, and she is not one jot less than the husband,  
The daughter, and she is just as good as the son,  
The mother, and she is every bit as much as the father.

Offspring of ignorant and poor, boys apprenticed to trades,  
Young fellows working on farms and old fellows working on farms,  
Sailor-men, merchant-men, coasters, immigrants,  
All these I see, but nigher and farther the same I see,  
None shall escape me and none shall wish to escape me.

I bring what you much need yet always have,  
Not money, amours, dress, eating, erudition, but as good,  
I send no agent or medium, offer no representative of value, but  
offer the value itself.

There is something that comes to one now and perpetually,  
It is not what is printed, preach'd, discussed, it eludes discussion

and print,

It is not to be put in a book, it is not in this book,

It is for you whoever you are, it is no farther from you than your

hearing and sight are from you,

It is hinted by nearest, commonest, readiest, it is ever provoked by them.

You may read in many languages, yet read nothing about it,

You may read the President's message and read nothing about it there,

Nothing in the reports from the State department or Treasury

department, or in the daily papers or weekly papers,

Or in the census or revenue returns, prices current, or any accounts

of stock.

3

The sun and stars that float in the open air,

The apple-shaped earth and we upon it, surely the drift of them is

something grand,

I do not know what it is except that it is grand, and that it is happiness,

And that the enclosing purport of us here is not a speculation or

bon-mot or reconnoissance,

And that it is not something which by luck may turn out well for us,

and without luck must be a failure for us,

And not something which may yet be retracted in a certain contingency.

The light and shade, the curious sense of body and identity, the

greed that with perfect complaisance devours all things,

The endless pride and outstretching of man, unspeakable joys and sorrows,  
The wonder every one sees in every one else he sees, and the wonders  
that fill each minute of time forever,

What have you reckon'd them for, camerado?

Have you reckon'd them for your trade or farm-work? or for the  
profits of your store?

Or to achieve yourself a position? or to fill a gentleman's leisure,  
or a lady's leisure?

Have you reckon'd that the landscape took substance and form that it  
might be painted in a picture?

Or men and women that they might be written of, and songs sung?

Or the attraction of gravity, and the great laws and harmonious combinations  
and the fluids of the air, as subjects for the savans?

Or the brown land and the blue sea for maps and charts?

Or the stars to be put in constellations and named fancy names?

Or that the growth of seeds is for agricultural tables, or  
agriculture itself?

Old institutions, these arts, libraries, legends, collections, and  
the practice handed along in manufactures, will we rate them so high?

Will we rate our cash and business high? I have no objection,

I rate them as high as the highest--then a child born of a woman and  
man I rate beyond all rate.

We thought our Union grand, and our Constitution grand,

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

We consider bibles and religions divine--I do not say they are not divine,  
I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still,  
It is not they who give the life, it is you who give the life,  
Leaves are not more shed from the trees, or trees from the earth,  
    than they are shed out of you.

4

The sum of all known reverence I add up in you whoever you are,  
The President is there in the White House for you, it is not you who  
    are here for him,  
The Secretaries act in their bureaus for you, not you here for them,  
The Congress convenes every Twelfth-month for you,  
Laws, courts, the forming of States, the charters of cities, the  
    going and coming of commerce and malls, are all for you.

List close my scholars dear,  
Doctrines, politics and civilization exurge from you,  
Sculpture and monuments and any thing inscribed anywhere are tallied in you,  
The gist of histories and statistics as far back as the records  
    reach is in you this hour, and myths and tales the same,  
If you were not breathing and walking here, where would they all be?  
The most renown'd poems would be ashes, orations and plays would

be vacuums.

All architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it,  
(Did you think it was in the white or gray stone? or the lines of  
the arches and cornices?)

All music is what awakes from you when you are reminded by the instruments,  
It is not the violins and the cornets, it is not the oboe nor the  
beating drums, nor the score of the baritone singer singing his  
sweet romanza, nor that of the men's chorus, nor that of the  
women's chorus,  
It is nearer and farther than they.

5

Will the whole come back then?  
Can each see signs of the best by a look in the looking-glass? is  
there nothing greater or more?  
Does all sit there with you, with the mystic unseen soul?

Strange and hard that paradox true I give,  
Objects gross and the unseen soul are one.

House-building, measuring, sawing the boards,  
Blacksmithing, glass-blowing, nail-making, coopering, tin-roofing,  
shingle-dressing,  
Ship-joining, dock-building, fish-curing, flagging of sidewalks by flaggers,

The pump, the pile-driver, the great derrick, the coal-kiln and brickkiln,  
Coal-mines and all that is down there, the lamps in the darkness,  
    echoes, songs, what meditations, what vast native thoughts  
    looking through smutch'd faces,  
Iron-works, forge-fires in the mountains or by river-banks, men  
    around feeling the melt with huge crowbars, lumps of ore, the  
    due combining of ore, limestone, coal,  
The blast-furnace and the puddling-furnace, the loup-lump at the  
    bottom of the melt at last, the rolling-mill, the stumpy bars  
    of pig-iron, the strong clean-shaped Trail for railroads,  
Oil-works, silk-works, white-lead-works, the sugar-house,  
    steam-saws, the great mills and factories,  
Stone-cutting, shapely trimmings for facades or window or door-lintels,  
    the mallet, the tooth-chisel, the jib to protect the thumb,  
The calking-iron, the kettle of boiling vault-cement, and the fire  
    under the kettle,  
The cotton-bale, the stevedore's hook, the saw and buck of the  
    sawyer, the mould of the moulder, the working-knife of the  
    butcher, the ice-saw, and all the work with ice,  
The work and tools of the rigger, grappler, sail-maker, block-maker,  
Goods of gutta-percha, papier-mache, colors, brushes, brush-making,  
    glazier's implements,  
The veneer and glue-pot, the confectioner's ornaments, the decanter  
    and glasses, the shears and flat-iron,  
The awl and knee-strap, the pint measure and quart measure, the  
    counter and stool, the writing-pen of quill or metal, the making



of all sorts of edged tools,  
The brewery, brewing, the malt, the vats, every thing that is done  
by brewers, wine-makers, vinegar-makers,  
Leather-dressing, coach-making, boiler-making, rope-twisting,  
distilling, sign-painting, lime-burning, cotton-picking,  
electroplating, electrotyping, stereotyping,  
Stave-machines, planing-machines, reaping-machines,  
ploughing-machines, thrashing-machines, steam wagons,  
The cart of the carman, the omnibus, the ponderous dray,  
Pyrotechny, letting off color'd fireworks at night, fancy figures and jets;  
Beef on the butcher's stall, the slaughter-house of the butcher, the  
butcher in his killing-clothes,  
The pens of live pork, the killing-hammer, the hog-hook, the  
scalding tub, gutting, the cutter's cleaver, the packer's maul,  
and the plenteous winterwork of pork-packing,  
Flour-works, grinding of wheat, rye, maize, rice, the barrels and  
the half and quarter barrels, the loaded barges, the high piles  
on wharves and levees,  
The men and the work of the men on ferries, railroads, coasters,  
fish-boats, canals;  
The hourly routine of your own or any man's life, the shop, yard,  
store, or factory,  
These shows all near you by day and night--workman! whoever you  
are, your daily life!

In that and them the heft of the heaviest--in that and them far more

than you estimated, (and far less also,)

In them realities for you and me, in them poems for you and me,

In them, not yourself-you and your soul enclose all things,

regardless of estimation,

In them the development good--in them all themes, hints, possibilities.

I do not affirm that what you see beyond is futile, I do not advise

you to stop,

I do not say leadings you thought great are not great,

But I say that none lead to greater than these lead to.

6

Will you seek afar off? you surely come back at last,

In things best known to you finding the best, or as good as the best,

In folks nearest to you finding the sweetest, strongest, lovingest,

Happiness, knowledge, not in another place but this place, not for

another hour but this hour,

Man in the first you see or touch, always in friend, brother,

nighest neighbor--woman in mother, sister, wife,

The popular tastes and employments taking precedence in poems or anywhere,

You workwomen and workmen of these States having your own divine

and strong life,

And all else giving place to men and women like you.

When the psalm sings instead of the singer,

When the script preaches instead of the preacher,

When the pulpit descends and goes instead of the carver that carved  
the supporting desk,  
When I can touch the body of books by night or by day, and when they  
touch my body back again,  
When a university course convinces like a slumbering woman and child  
convince,  
When the minted gold in the vault smiles like the night-watchman's daughter,  
When warrantee deeds loafe in chairs opposite and are my friendly  
companions,  
I intend to reach them my hand, and make as much of them as I do  
of men and women like you.