

BOOK XXIX

To Think of Time

1

To think of time--of all that retrospection,
To think of to-day, and the ages continued henceforward.

Have you guess'd you yourself would not continue?
Have you dreaded these earth-beetles?
Have you fear'd the future would be nothing to you?

Is to-day nothing? is the beginningless past nothing?
If the future is nothing they are just as surely nothing.

To think that the sun rose in the east--that men and women were
flexible, real, alive--that every thing was alive,
To think that you and I did not see, feel, think, nor bear our part,
To think that we are now here and bear our part.

2

Not a day passes, not a minute or second without an accouchement,
Not a day passes, not a minute or second without a corpse.

The dull nights go over and the dull days also,

The soreness of lying so much in bed goes over,
The physician after long putting off gives the silent and terrible
look for an answer,
The children come hurried and weeping, and the brothers and sisters
are sent for,
Medicines stand unused on the shelf, (the camphor-smell has long
pervaded the rooms,)
The faithful hand of the living does not desert the hand of the dying,
The twitching lips press lightly on the forehead of the dying,
The breath ceases and the pulse of the heart ceases,
The corpse stretches on the bed and the living look upon it,
It is palpable as the living are palpable.

The living look upon the corpse with their eyesight,
But without eyesight lingers a different living and looks curiously
on the corpse.

3

To think the thought of death merged in the thought of materials,
To think of all these wonders of city and country, and others taking
great interest in them, and we taking no interest in them.

To think how eager we are in building our houses,
To think others shall be just as eager, and we quite indifferent.

(I see one building the house that serves him a few years, or

seventy or eighty years at most,
I see one building the house that serves him longer than that.)

Slow-moving and black lines creep over the whole earth--they never
cease--they are the burial lines,
He that was President was buried, and he that is now President shall
surely be buried.

4

A reminiscence of the vulgar fate,
A frequent sample of the life and death of workmen,
Each after his kind.

Cold dash of waves at the ferry-wharf, posh and ice in the river,
half-frozen mud in the streets,
A gray discouraged sky overhead, the short last daylight of December,
A hearse and stages, the funeral of an old Broadway stage-driver,
the cortege mostly drivers.

Steady the trot to the cemetery, duly rattles the death-bell,
The gate is pass'd, the new-dug grave is halted at, the living
alight, the hearse uncloses,
The coffin is pass'd out, lower'd and settled, the whip is laid on
the coffin, the earth is swiftly shovel'd in,
The mound above is flatted with the spades--silence,

A minute--no one moves or speaks--it is done,
He is decently put away--is there any thing more?

He was a good fellow, free-mouth'd, quick-temper'd, not bad-looking,
Ready with life or death for a friend, fond of women, gambled, ate
 hearty, drank hearty,
Had known what it was to be flush, grew low-spirited toward the
 last, sicken'd, was help'd by a contribution,
Died, aged forty-one years--and that was his funeral.

Thumb extended, finger uplifted, apron, cape, gloves, strap,
 wet-weather clothes, whip carefully chosen,
Boss, spotter, starter, hostler, somebody loafing on you, you
 loafing on somebody, headway, man before and man behind,
Good day's work, bad day's work, pet stock, mean stock, first out,
 last out, turning-in at night,
To think that these are so much and so nigh to other drivers, and he
 there takes no interest in them.

5

The markets, the government, the working-man's wages, to think what
 account they are through our nights and days,
To think that other working-men will make just as great account of
 them, yet we make little or no account.

The vulgar and the refined, what you call sin and what you call

goodness, to think how wide a difference,

To think the difference will still continue to others, yet we lie
beyond the difference.

To think how much pleasure there is,

Do you enjoy yourself in the city? or engaged in business? or

planning a nomination and election? or with your wife and family?

Or with your mother and sisters? or in womanly housework? or the
beautiful maternal cares?

These also flow onward to others, you and I flow onward,

But in due time you and I shall take less interest in them.

Your farm, profits, crops--to think how engross'd you are,

To think there will still be farms, profits, crops, yet for you of
what avail?

6

What will be will be well, for what is is well,

To take interest is well, and not to take interest shall be well.

The domestic joys, the dally housework or business, the building of

houses, are not phantasms, they have weight, form, location,

Farms, profits, crops, markets, wages, government, are none of them
phantasms,

The difference between sin and goodness is no delusion,

The earth is not an echo, man and his life and all the things of his

life are well-consider'd.

You are not thrown to the winds, you gather certainly and safely
around yourself,
Yourself! yourself!. yourself, for ever and ever!

7

It is not to diffuse you that you were born of your mother and
father, it is to identify you,
It is not that you should be undecided, but that you should be decided,
Something long preparing and formless is arrived and form'd in you,
You are henceforth secure, whatever comes or goes.

The threads that were spun are gather'd, the wet crosses the warp,
the pattern is systematic.

The preparations have every one been justified,
The orchestra have sufficiently tuned their instruments, the baton
has given the signal.

The guest that was coming, he waited long, he is now housed,
He is one of those who are beautiful and happy, he is one of those
that to look upon and be with is enough.

The law of the past cannot be eluded,
The law of the present and future cannot be eluded,

The law of the living cannot be eluded, it is eternal,
The law of promotion and transformation cannot be eluded,
The law of heroes and good-doers cannot be eluded,
The law of drunkards, informers, mean persons, not one iota thereof
can be eluded.

8

Slow moving and black lines go ceaselessly over the earth,
Northerner goes carried and Southerner goes carried, and they on the
Atlantic side and they on the Pacific,
And they between, and all through the Mississippi country, and all
over the earth.

The great masters and kosmos are well as they go, the heroes and
good-doers are well,
The known leaders and inventors and the rich owners and pious and
distinguish'd may be well,
But there is more account than that, there is strict account of all.

The interminable hordes of the ignorant and wicked are not nothing,
The barbarians of Africa and Asia are not nothing,
The perpetual successions of shallow people are not nothing as they go.

Of and in all these things,
I have dream'd that we are not to be changed so much, nor the law of
us changed,

I have dream'd that heroes and good-doers shall be under the present
and past law,

And that murderers, drunkards, liars, shall be under the present and
past law,

For I have dream'd that the law they are under now is enough.

And I have dream'd that the purpose and essence of the known life,
the transient,

Is to form and decide identity for the unknown life, the permanent.

If all came but to ashes of dung,

If maggots and rats ended us, then Alarum! for we are betray'd,

Then indeed suspicion of death.

Do you suspect death? if I were to suspect death I should die now,

Do you think I could walk pleasantly and well-suited toward annihilation?

Pleasantly and well-suited I walk,

Whither I walk I cannot define, but I know it is good,

The whole universe indicates that it is good,

The past and the present indicate that it is good.

How beautiful and perfect are the animals!

How perfect the earth, and the minutest thing upon it!

What is called good is perfect, and what is called bad is just as perfect,

The vegetables and minerals are all perfect, and the imponderable

fluids perfect;

Slowly and surely they have pass'd on to this, and slowly and surely
they yet pass on.

9

I swear I think now that every thing without exception has an eternal soul!
The trees have, rooted in the ground! the weeds of the sea have! the
animals!

I swear I think there is nothing but immortality!
That the exquisite scheme is for it, and the nebulous float is for
it, and the cohering is for it!
And all preparation is for it--and identity is for it--and life and
materials are altogether for it!