

INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly Mrs. Gilchrist's "Estimate of Walt Whitman," published in the (Boston) Radical in May, 1870, was the finest, as it was the first, public tribute ever paid to the poet by a woman. Whitman himself so considered it--"the proudest word that ever came to me from a woman--if not the proudest word of all from any source." But a finer tribute was to follow, in the sacred privacy of the love-letters which are now made public forty years and more after they were written. The purpose of this Introduction is not to interpret those letters, but to sketch the story in the light of which they are to be read. And since both Anne Gilchrist and Walt Whitman have had sympathetic and painstaking biographers, it will not be necessary here to mention at length the already known facts of their respective lives.

The story naturally begins with Whitman. He was born at West Hills, Long Island, New York, on May 31, 1819. His father was of English descent, and came of a family of sailors and farmers. His mother, to whom he himself attributed most of his personal qualities, was of excellent Hollandic stock. Moving to Brooklyn while still in frocks, he there passed his boyhood and youth, but took many summer trips to visit relatives in the country. He early left the public school for the printing offices of local newspapers, picking enough general knowledge to enable him, when about seventeen years of age, to teach schools in the rural districts of his native island. Very early in life he became a writer, chiefly of short prose tales and essays, which were accepted by the best New York

magazines. His literary and journalistic work was not confined to the metropolis, but took him, for a few months in 1848, so far away from home as New Orleans. In 1851-54, besides writing for and editing newspapers, he was engaged in housebuilding, the trade of his father. Although this was, it is said, a profitable business, he gave it up to write poetry, and issued his first volume, "Leaves of Grass," in 1855. The book had been written with great pains, according to a preconceived plan of the author to be stated in the preface; and it was finally set up (by his own hands, for want of a publisher) only, as he tells us, after many "doings and undoings, leaving out the stock 'poetical' touches." Its publication was the occasion of probably the most voluminous controversy of American letters--mostly abuse, ridicule, and condemnation.

In 1862 Whitman's brother George, who had volunteered in the Union Army, was reported badly wounded in the Fredericksburg fight. Walt, going at once to the war front in Virginia, found that his brother's wound was not serious enough to require his ministrations, but gradually he became engaged in nursing other wounded soldiers, until this work, as a volunteer hospital missionary in Washington, engrossed the major part of his time. This continued until and for some years after the end of the war.

Whitman's own needs were supplied by occasional literary work and from his earnings as a clerk first in the Interior and later in the Attorney General's Department. He had gone to Washington a man of strong and majestic physique, but his untiring devotion, fidelity, and vigilance in nursing the sick and wounded soldiers in the army hospitals in and about Washington was soon to shatter that constitution which was ever a marvel to its possessor, and to condemn him to pass the last two decades of his

life in unaccustomed invalidism. The history of the Civil War in America presents no instance of nobler fulfilment of duty or of sublimer sacrifice.

Meanwhile his muse was not neglected. His book had gone through four editions, and, with the increment of the noble war poetry of "Drum Taps," had become a volume of size. At a very early period "Leaves of Grass" had been hailed as an important literary contribution by a few of the best thinkers in this country and in England but, generally speaking, nearly all literary persons received it with much criticism and many qualifications. In Washington devoted disciples like William Douglas O'Connor and John Burroughs never varied in their uncompromising adherence to the book and its author. This appreciation only by the few was likewise encountered in England. The book had made a stir among the literary classes, but its importance was not at all generally recognized. Men like John Addington Symonds, Edward Dowden, and William Michael Rossetti were, however, almost unrestricted in their praise.

It was William Rossetti who planned, in 1867, to bring out in England a volume of selections from Whitman's poetry, in the belief that it was better to leave out the poems that had provoked such adverse criticism, in order to get Whitman a foothold among those who might prefer to have an expurgated edition. Whitman's attitude toward the plan at the time is given in a letter which he wrote to Rossetti on December 3, 1867: "I cannot and will not consent of my own volition to countenance an expurgated edition of my pieces. I have steadily refused to do so under seductive offers, here in my own country, and must not do so in another

country." It appeared, however, that Rossetti had already advanced his project, and Whitman graciously added: "If, before the arrival of this letter, you have practically invested in, and accomplished, or partially accomplished, any plan, even contrary to this letter, I do not expect you to abandon it, at loss of outlay; but shall bona fide consider you blameless if you let it go on, and be carried out, as you may have arranged. It is the question of the authorization of an expurgated edition proceeding from me, that deepest engages me. The facts of the different ways, one way or another way, in which the book may appear in England, out of influences not under the shelter of my umbrage, are of much less importance to me. After making the foregoing explanation, I shall, I think, accept kindly whatever happens. For I feel, indeed know, that I am in the hands of a friend, and that my pieces will receive that truest, brightest of light and perception coming from love. In that, all other and lesser requisites become pale...." The Rossetti "Selections" duly appeared--with what momentous influence upon the two persons whose friendship we are tracing will presently be shown.

On June 22, 1869, Anne Gilchrist, writing to Rossetti, said: "I was calling on Madox Brown a fortnight ago, and he put into my hands your edition of Walt Whitman's poems. I shall not cease to thank him for that. Since I have had it, I can read no other book: it holds me entirely spellbound, and I go through it again and again with deepening delight and wonder. How can one refrain from expressing gratitude to you for what you have so admirably done?..." To this Rossetti promptly responded: "Your letter has given me keen pleasure this morning. That glorious man Whitman will one day be known as one of the greatest sons of Earth, a few steps

below Shakespeare on the throne of immortality. What a tearing-away of the obscuring veil of use and wont from the visage of man and of life! I am doing myself the pleasure of at once ordering a copy of the "Selections" for you, which you will be so kind as to accept. Genuine--i. e., enthusiastic--appreciators are not so common, and must be cultivated when they appear.... Anybody who values Whitman as you do ought to read the whole of him...." At a later date Rossetti gave Mrs. Gilchrist a copy of the complete "Leaves of Grass," in acknowledging which she said, "The gift of yours I have not any words to tell you how priceless it will be to me...." This lengthy letter was later, at Rossetti's solicitation, worked over for publication as the "Estimate of Walt Whitman" to which reference has already been made.

Anne Gilchrist was primarily a woman of letters. Though her natural bent was toward science and philosophy, her marriage threw her into association with artists and writers of belles lettres. She was born in London on February 25, 1828. She came of excellent ancestry, and received a good education, particularly in music. She had a profoundly religious nature, although it appears that she was never a believer in many of the orthodox Christian doctrines. Very early in life she recognized the greatness of such men as Emerson and Comte. In 1851, at the age of twenty-three, she married Alexander Gilchrist, two months her junior. Though of limited means, he possessed literary ability and was then preparing for the bar. His early writings secured for him the friendship of Carlyle, who for years lived next door to the Gilchrists in Cheyne Row. This friendship led to others, and the Gilchrists were soon introduced into that supreme literary circle which included Ruskin, Herbert Spencer, George Eliot, the

Rossettis, Tennyson, and many another great mind of that illustrious age.

Within ten years of their marriage the Gilchrists had four children, in whom they were very happy. But in the year 1861, when Anne was thirty-three years of age, her husband died. It was a terrible blow, but she faced the future unflinchingly, and reared her children, giving to each of them a profession. At the time of her husband's death his life of William Blake was nearing completion. With the assistance of William and Gabriel Rossetti Mrs. Gilchrist finished the work on this excellent biography, and it was published by Macmillan. Whitman has paid a fitting tribute to the pluck exhibited in this achievement: "Do you know much of Blake?" said Whitman to Horace Traubel, who records the conversation in his remarkable book "With Walt Whitman in Camden." "You know, this is Mrs. Gilchrist's book--the book she completed. They had made up their minds to do the work--her husband had it well under way: he caught a fever and was carried off. Mrs. Gilchrist was left with four young children, alone: her perplexities were great. Have you noticed that the time to look for the best things in best people is the moment of their greatest need? Look at Lincoln: he is our proudest example: he proved to be big as, bigger than, any emergency--his grasp was a giant's grasp--made dark things light, made hard things easy.... (Mrs. Gilchrist) belonged to the same noble breed: seized the reins, was competent; her head was clear, her hand was firm."

The circumstances under which she first read Whitman's poetry have been narrated. When in 1869 Whitman became aware of the Rossetti correspondence, he felt greatly honoured, and through Rossetti he sent his portrait to the as yet anonymous lady. In acknowledging this communication

his English friend has a grateful word from "the lady" to return: "I gave your letter, and the second copy of your portrait, to the lady you refer to, and need scarcely say how truly delighted she was. She has asked me to say that you could not have devised for her a more welcome pleasure, and that she feels grateful to me for having sent to America the extracts from what she had written, since they have been a satisfaction to you...."

Early in 1870 the "Estimate" appeared in the Radical, still more than a year before Mrs. Gilchrist addressed her first letter to Whitman. He welcomed the essay, and its author as a new and peculiarly powerful champion of "Leaves of Grass." To Rossetti he wrote: "I am deeply touched by these sympathies and convictions, coming from a woman and from England, and am sure that if the lady knew how much comfort it has been to me to get them, she would not only pardon you for transmitting them but approve that action. I realize indeed of this smiling and emphatic well done from the heart and conscience of a true wife and mother, and one, too, whose sense of the poetic, as I glean from your letter, after flowing through the heart and conscience, must also move through and satisfy science as much as the esthetic, that I had hitherto received no eulogium so magnificent." Concerning this experience Whitman said to Horace Traubel, at a much later period: "You can imagine what such a thing as her 'Estimate' meant to me at that time. Almost everybody was against me--the papers, the preachers, the literary gentlemen--nearly everybody with only here and there a dissenting voice--when it looked on the surface as if my enterprise was bound to fail ... then this wonderful woman. Such things stagger a man ... I had got so used to being ignored or denounced that the appearance of a friend was always accompanied with a sort of shock.... There are shocks that knock you up, shocks that knock you down. Mrs.

Gilchrist never wavered from her first decision. I have that sort of feeling about her which cannot easily be spoken of--...: love (strong personal love, too), reverence, respect--you see, it won't go into words: all the words are weak and formal." Speaking again of her first criticism of his work, he said: "I remember well how one of my noblest, best friends--one of my wisest, cutest, profoundest, most candid critics--how Mrs. Gilchrist, even to the last, insisted that "Leaves of Grass" was not the mouthpiece of parlours, refinements--no--but the language of strength, power, passion, intensity, absorption, sincerity...." He claimed a closer relationship to her than he allowed to Rossetti: "Rossetti mentions Mrs. Gilchrist. Well, he had a right to--almost as much right as I had: a sort of brother's right: she was his friend, she was more than my friend. I feel like Hamlet when he said forty thousand brothers could not feel what he felt for Ophelia. After all ... we were a family--a happy family: the few of us who got together, going with love the same way--we were a happy family. The crowd was on the other side but we were on our side--we: a few of us, just a few: and despite our paucity of numbers we made ourselves tell for the good cause."

From these expressions it is quite clear that Whitman's attitude toward Mrs. Gilchrist was at first that of the unpopular prophet who finds a worthy and welcome disciple in an unexpected place. And that he should have so felt was but natural, for she had been drawn to him, as she confided to him in one of her letters, by what he had written rather than and not by her knowledge of the man. There can be no doubt, however, that on Mrs. Gilchrist's part something more than the friendship of her new-found liberator was desired. When she read the "Leaves of Grass" she

was forty-one years of age, in the full vigour of womanhood. To her the reading meant a new birth, causing her to pour out her soul to the prophet and poet across the seas with a freedom and abandon that were phenomenal. This was in the first letter printed in this volume, under date of September 3, 1871, and about the time that Whitman had sent to his new supporter a copy of his poems. Perhaps the strongest reason why Whitman did not reply to passion with passion lies in the fact that his heart was, so far as attachments of that sort were concerned, already bestowed elsewhere. I am indebted to Professor Holloway for the information that Whitman was, in 1864, the unfortunate lover of a certain lady whose previous marriage to another, while it did not dim their mutual devotion, did serve to keep them apart. To her Whitman wrote that heart-wrung lyric of separation, "Out of the rolling ocean, the crowd." This suggests that there was probably a double tragedy, so ironical is the fate of the affections, Anne Gilchrist and Walt Whitman both passionately yearning for personal love yet unable to quench the one desire in the other.

But if there could not be between them the love which leads to marriage, there could be a noble and tender and life-long friendship. Over this Whitman's loss of his magnificent health, to be followed by an invalidism of twenty years, had no power. In 1873 Whitman was stricken with paralysis, which rendered him so helpless that he had to give up his work and finally his position, and to go to live for the rest of his life in Camden, New Jersey. Mrs. Gilchrist's affection for him did not waver when this trial was made of it. Indeed, his illness had the effect, as these letters show, of quickening the desire which she had had for several years (since 1869) of coming to live in America, that she might be near him to

lighten his burdens, and, if she could not hope to cherish him as a wife, that she might at least care for him as a mother. Whitman, it will be noted, strongly advised against this plan. Just why he wished to keep her away from America is unclear, possibly because he dared not put so idealistic a friendship and discipleship to the test of personal acquaintance with a prematurely broken old man. Nevertheless, on August 30, 1876, Mrs. Gilchrist set sail, with three of her children, for Philadelphia. They arrived in September. From that date until the spring of 1878 the Gilchrists kept house at 1929 North Twenty-second street, Philadelphia, where Whitman was a frequent and regular visitor.

It is interesting to note that Mrs. Gilchrist's appreciation of Whitman did not lessen after she had met and known him in the intimacy of that tea-table circle which at her house discussed the same great variety of topics--literature, religion, science, politics--that had enlivened the O'Connor breakfast table in Washington. She shall describe it and him herself. In a letter to Rossetti, under date of December 22, 1876, she writes: "But I need not tell you that our greatest pleasure is the society of Mr. Whitman, who fully realizes the ideal I had formed from his poems, and brings such an atmosphere of cordiality and geniality with him as is indescribable. He is really making slow but, I trust, steady progress toward recovery, having been much cheered (and no doubt that acted favourably upon his health) by the sympathy manifested toward him in England and the pleasure of finding so many buyers of his poems there. It must be a deep satisfaction to you to have been the channel through which this help and comfort flowed...." And a year later she writes to the same correspondent: "We are having delightful evenings this winter; how often

do I wish you could make one in the circle around our tea table where sits on my right hand every evening but Sunday Walt Whitman. He has made great progress in health and recovered powers of getting about during the year we have been here: nevertheless the lameness--the dragging instead of lifting the left leg continues; and this together with his white hair and beard give him a look of age curiously contradicted by his face, which has not only the ruddy freshness but the full, rounded contours of youth, nowhere drawn or wrinkled or sunk; it is a face as indicative of serenity and goodness and of mental and bodily health as the brow is of intellectual power. But I notice he occasionally speaks of himself as having a 'wounded brain,' and of being still quite altered from his former self."

Whitman, on his part, thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon sunshine of such friendly hospitality, for he considered Mrs. Gilchrist even more gifted as a conversationalist than as a writer. For hints of the sort of talk that flowed with Mrs. Gilchrist's tea I must refer the reader to her son's realistic biography.

After two years of residence in Philadelphia, the Gilchrists went to dwell in Boston and later in New York City, and met the leaders in the two literary capitals. From these addresses the letters begin again, after the natural interruption of two years. It is at this time that the first letters from Herbert and Beatrice Gilchrist were written. These are given in this volume to complete the chain and to show how completely they were in sympathy with their mother in their love and appreciation of Whitman. From New York they all sailed for their old home in England on June 7,

1879. Whitman came the day before to wish them good voyage. The chief reason for the return to England seems to have been the desire to send Beatrice to Berne to complete her medical education. After the return to England, or rather while they are still en route at Glasgow, the letters begin again.

Several years of literary work yet remained to Mrs. Gilchrist. The chief writings of these years were a new edition of the Blake, a life of Mary Lamb for the Eminent Women Series, an article on Blake for the Dictionary of National Biography, several essays including "Three Glimpses of a New England Village," and the "Confession of Faith." She was beginning a careful study of the life and writings of Carlyle, with the intention of writing a life of her old friend to reply to the aspersions of Freude. This last work was, however, never completed, for early in 1882 some malady which rendered her breathing difficult had already begun to cast the shadow of death upon her. But her faith, long schooled in the optimism of "Leaves of Grass," looked upon the steadily approaching end with calmness. On November 29, 1885, she died.

When Whitman was informed of her death by Herbert Gilchrist, he could find words for only the following brief reply:

15th December 1885.

Camden, United States, America.

DEAR HERBERT:

I have received your letter. Nothing now remains but a sweet and rich memory--none more beautiful all time, all life all the earth--I cannot write anything of a letter to-day. I must sit alone and think.

WALT WHITMAN.

Later, in conversations with Horace Traubel which the latter has preserved in his minute biography of Whitman, he was able to express his regard for Mrs. Gilchrist more fully--"a supreme character of whom the world knows too little for its own good ... If her sayings had been recorded--I do not say she would pale, but I do say she would equal the best of the women of our century--add something as great as any to the testimony on the side of her sex." And at another time: "Oh! she was strangely different from the average; entirely herself; as simple as nature; true, honest; beautiful as a tree is tall, leafy, rich, full, free--is a tree. Yet, free as she was by nature, bound by no conventionalisms, she was the most courageous of women; more than queenly; of high aspect in the best sense. She was not cold; she had her passions; I have known her to warm up--to resent something that was said; some impeachment of good things--great things; of a person sometimes; she had the largest charity, the sweetest fondest optimism.... She was a radical of radicals; enjoyed all sorts of high enthusiasms: was exquisitely sensitized; belonged to the times yet to come; her vision went on and on."

This searching interpretation of her character wants only her artist son's description of her personal appearance to make the final picture complete: "A little above the average height, she walked with an even, light step.

Brown hair concealed a full and finely chiselled brow, and her hazel eyes bent upon you a bright and penetrating gaze. Whilst conversing her face became radiant as with an experience of golden years; humour was present in her conversation--flecks of sunshine, such as sometimes play about the minds of deeply religious natures. Her animated manner seldom flagged, and charmed the taciturn to talking in his or her best humour." Once, when speaking to Walt Whitman of the beauty of the human speaking voice, he replied: "The voice indicates the soul. Hers, with its varied modulations and blended tones, was the tenderest, most musical voice ever to bless our ears."

Her death was a long-lasting shock to Whitman. "She was a wonderful woman--a sort of human miracle to me.... Her taking off ... was a great shock to me: I have never quite got over it: she was near to me: she was subtle: her grasp on my work was tremendous--so sure, so all around, so adequate." If this sounds a trifle self-centred in its criticism, not so was the poem which, in memory of her, he wrote as a fitting epitaph from the poet she had loved.

"GOING SOMEWHERE"

My science-friend, my noblest woman-friend (Now buried in an English
grave--and this a memory-leaf for her dear sake),
Ended our talk--"The sum, concluding all we know of old or modern
learning, intuitions deep,
Of all Geologies--Histories--of all Astronomy--of Evolution, Metaphysics

all,

Is, that we all are onward, onward, speeding slowly, surely bettering,

Life, life an endless march, an endless army (no halt, but, it is duly

over),

The world, the race, the soul--in space and time the universes,

All bound as is befitting each--all surely going somewhere."

THE LETTERS OF ANNE GILCHRIST AND WALT WHITMAN

A WOMAN'S ESTIMATE OF WALT WHITMAN[1]

[FROM LETTERS BY ANNE GILCHRIST TO W. M. ROSSETTI.]

June 23, 1869.--I am very sure you are right in your estimate of Walt Whitman. There is nothing in him that I shall ever let go my hold of. For me the reading of his poems is truly a new birth of the soul.

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.

July 11.--I think it was very manly and kind of you to put the whole of Walt Whitman's poems into my hands; and that I have no other friend who

would have judged them and me so wisely and generously.

I had not dreamed that words could cease to be words, and become electric streams like these. I do assure you that, strong as I am, I feel sometimes as if I had not bodily strength to read many of these poems. In the series headed "Calamus," for instance, in some of the "Songs of Parting," the "Voice out of the Sea," the poem beginning "Tears, Tears," &c., there is such a weight of emotion, such a tension of the heart, that mine refuses to beat under it,--stands quite still,--and I am obliged to lay the book down for a while. Or again, in the piece called "Walt Whitman," and one or two others of that type, I am as one hurried through stormy seas, over high mountains, dazed with sunlight, stunned with a crowd and tumult of faces and voices, till I am breathless, bewildered, half dead. Then come parts and whole poems in which there is such calm wisdom and strength of thought, such a cheerful breadth of sunshine, that the soul bathes in them renewed and strengthened. Living impulses flow out of these that make me exult in life, yet look longingly towards "the superb vistas of Death." Those who admire this poem, and don't care for that, and talk of formlessness, absence of metre, &c., are quite as far from any genuine recognition of Walt Whitman as his bitter detractors. Not, of course, that all the pieces are equal in power and beauty, but that all are vital; they grew--they were not made. We criticise a palace or a cathedral; but what is the good of criticising a forest? Are not the hitherto-accepted masterpieces of literature akin rather to noble architecture; built up of material rendered precious by elaboration; planned with subtile art that makes beauty go hand in hand with rule and measure, and knows where the last stone will come, before the first is laid; the result stately, fixed,

yet such as might, in every particular, have been different from what it is (therefore inviting criticism), contrasting proudly with the careless freedom of nature, opposing its own rigid adherence to symmetry to her willful dallying with it? But not such is this book. Seeds brought by the winds from north, south, east, and west, lying long in the earth, not resting on it like the stately building, but hid in and assimilating it, shooting upwards to be nourished by the air and the sunshine and the rain which beat idly against that,--each bough and twig and leaf growing in strength and beauty its own way, a law to itself, yet, with all this freedom of spontaneous growth, the result inevitable, unalterable (therefore setting criticism at naught), above all things, vital,--that is, a source of ever-generating vitality: such are these poems.

"Roots and leaves themselves alone are these,
Scents brought to men and women from the wild woods and from the
 pondside,
Breast sorrel and pinks of love, fingers that wind around tighter than
 vines,
Gushes from the throats of birds hid in the foliage of trees as the sun
 is risen,
Breezes of land and love, breezes set from living shores out to you on
 the living sea,--to you, O sailors!
Frost-mellowed berries and Third-month twigs, offered fresh to young
 persons wandering out in the fields when the winter breaks up,
Love-buds put before you and within you, whoever you are,
Buds to be unfolded on the old terms.
If you bring the warmth of the sun to them, they will open, and bring

form, colour, perfume, to you:

If you become the aliment and the wet, they will become flowers, fruits,
tall branches and trees."

And the music takes good care of itself, too. As if it could be otherwise! As if those "large, melodious thoughts," those emotions, now so stormy and wild, now of unfathomed tenderness and gentleness, could fail to vibrate through the words in strong, sweeping, long-sustained chords, with lovely melodies winding in and out fitfully amongst them! Listen, for instance, to the penetrating sweetness, set in the midst of rugged grandeur, of the passage beginning,--

"I am he that walks with the tender and growing night;
I call to the earth and sea half held by the night."

I see that no counting of syllables will reveal the mechanism of the music; and that this rushing spontaneity could not stay to bind itself with the fetters of metre. But I know that the music is there, and that I would not for something change ears with those who cannot hear it. And I know that poetry must do one of two things,--either own this man as equal with her highest completest manifestors, or stand aside, and admit that there is something come into the world nobler, diviner than herself, one that is free of the universe, and can tell its secrets as none before.

I do not think or believe this; but see it with the same unmistakable definiteness of perception and full consciousness that I see the sun at this moment in the noonday sky, and feel his rays glowing down upon me as

I write in the open air. What more can you ask of the works of a man's mouth than that they should "absorb into you as food and air, to appear again in your strength, gait, face,"--that they should be "fibre and filter to your blood," joy and gladness to your whole nature?

I am persuaded that one great source of this kindling, vitalizing power--I suppose the great source--is the grasp laid upon the present, the fearless and comprehensive dealing with reality. Hitherto the leaders of thought have (except in science) been men with their faces resolutely turned backwards; men who have made of the past a tyrant that beggars and scorns the present, hardly seeing any greatness but what is shrouded away in the twilight, underground past; naming the present only for disparaging comparisons, humiliating distrust that tends to create the very barrenness it complains of; bidding me warm myself at fires that went out to mortal eyes centuries ago; insisting, in religion above all, that I must either "look through dead men's eyes," or shut my own in helpless darkness. Poets fancying themselves so happy over the chill and faded beauty of the past, but not making me happy at all,--rebellious always at being dragged down out of the free air and sunshine of to-day.

But this poet, this "athlete, full of rich words, full of joy," takes you by the hand, and turns you with your face straight forwards. The present is great enough for him, because he is great enough for it. It flows through him as a "vast oceanic tide," lifting up a mighty voice. Earth, "the eloquent, dumb, great mother," is not old, has lost none of her fresh charms, none of her divine meanings; still bears great sons and daughters, if only they would possess themselves and accept their birthright,--a

richer, not a poorer, heritage than was ever provided before,--richer by all the toil and suffering of the generations that have preceded, and by the further unfolding of the eternal purposes. Here is one come at last who can show them how; whose songs are the breath of a glad, strong, beautiful life, nourished sufficingly, kindled to unsurpassed intensity and greatness by the gifts of the present.

"Each moment and whatever happens thrills me with joy."

"O the joy of my soul leaning poised on itself,--receiving identity through materials, and loving them,--observing characters, and absorbing them!

O my soul vibrated back to me from them!

"O the gleesome saunter over fields and hillsides!

The leaves and flowers of the commonest weeds, the moist, fresh stillness of the woods,

The exquisite smell of the earth at daybreak, and all through the forenoon.

"O to realize space!

The plenteousness of all--that there are no bounds;

To emerge, and be of the sky--of the sun and moon and the flying clouds, as one with them.

"O the joy of suffering,--

To struggle against great odds, to meet enemies undaunted,

To be entirely alone with them--to find how much one can stand!"

I used to think it was great to disregard happiness, to press on to a high goal, careless, disdainful of it. But now I see that there is nothing so great as to be capable of happiness; to pluck it out of "each moment and whatever happens"; to find that one can ride as gay and buoyant on the angry, menacing, tumultuous waves of life as on those that glide and glitter under a clear sky; that it is not defeat and wretchedness which come out of the storm of adversity, but strength and calmness.

See, again, in the pieces gathered together under the title "Calamus," and elsewhere, what it means for a man to love his fellow-man. Did you dream it before? These "evangel-poems of comrades and of love" speak, with the abiding, penetrating power of prophecy, of a "new and superb friendship"; speak not as beautiful dreams, unrealizable aspirations to be laid aside in sober moods, because they breathe out what now glows within the poet's own breast, and flows out in action toward the men around him. Had ever any land before her poet, not only to concentrate within himself her life, and, when she kindled with anger against her children who were treacherous to the cause her life is bound up with, to announce and justify her terrible purpose in words of unsurpassable grandeur (as in the poem beginning, "Rise, O days, from your fathomless deeps"), but also to go and with his own hands dress the wounds, with his powerful presence soothe and sustain and nourish her suffering soldiers,--hundreds of them, thousands, tens of thousands,--by day and by night, for weeks, months, years?

"I sit by the restless all the dark night; some are so young,
Some suffer so much: I recall the experience sweet and sad.
Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have crossed and rested,
Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips:--"

Kisses, that touched with the fire of a strange, new, undying eloquence
the lips that received them! The most transcendent genius could not,
untaught by that "experience sweet and sad," have breathed out hymns for
her dead soldiers of such ineffably tender, sorrowful, yet triumphant
beauty.

But the present spreads before us other things besides those of which it
is easy to see the greatness and beauty; and the poet would leave us to
learn the hardest part of our lesson unhelped if he took no heed of these;
and would be unfaithful to his calling, as interpreter of man to himself
and of the scheme of things in relation to him, if he did not accept
all--if he did not teach "the great lesson of reception, neither
preference nor denial." If he feared to stretch out the hand, not of
condescending pity, but of fellowship, to the degraded, criminal, foolish,
despised, knowing that they are only laggards in "the great procession
winding along the roads of the universe," "the far-behind to come on in
their turn," knowing the "amplitude of Time," how could he roll the stone
of contempt off the heart as he does, and cut the strangling knot of the
problem of inherited viciousness and degradation? And, if he were not bold
and true to the utmost, and did not own in himself the threads of darkness
mixed in with the threads of light, and own it with the same strength and
directness that he tells of the light, and not in those vague generalities

that everybody uses, and nobody means, in speaking on this head,--in the worst, germs of all that is in the best; in the best, germs of all that is in the worst,--the brotherhood of the human race would be a mere flourish of rhetoric. And brotherhood is naught if it does not bring brother's love along with it. If the poet's heart were not "a measureless ocean of love" that seeks the lips and would quench the thirst of all, he were not the one we have waited for so long. Who but he could put at last the right meaning into that word "democracy," which has been made to bear such a burthen of incongruous notions?

"By God! I will have nothing that all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms!"

flashing it forth like a banner, making it draw the instant allegiance of every man and woman who loves justice. All occupations, however homely, all developments of the activities of man, need the poet's recognition, because every man needs the assurance that for him also the materials out of which to build up a great and satisfying life lie to hand, the sole magic in the use of them, all of the right stuff in the right hands. Hence those patient enumerations of every conceivable kind of industry:--

"In them far more than you estimated--in them far less also."

Far more as a means, next to nothing as an end: whereas we are wont to take it the other way, and think the result something, but the means a weariness. Out of all come strength, and the cheerfulness of strength. I murmured not a little, to say the truth, under these enumerations, at

first. But now I think that not only is their purpose a justification, but that the musical ear and vividness of perception of the poet have enabled him to perform this task also with strength and grace, and that they are harmonious as well as necessary parts of the great whole.

Nor do I sympathize with those who grumble at the unexpected words that turn up now and then. A quarrel with words is always, more or less, a quarrel with meanings; and here we are to be as genial and as wide as nature, and quarrel with nothing. If the thing a word stands for exists by divine appointment (and what does not so exist?), the word need never be ashamed of itself; the shorter and more direct, the better. It is a gain to make friends with it, and see it in good company. Here at all events, "poetic diction" would not serve,--not pretty, soft, colourless words, laid by in lavender for the special uses of poetry, that have had none of the wear and tear of daily life; but such as have stood most, as tell of human heart-beats, as fit closest to the sense, and have taken deep hues of association from the varied experiences of life--those are the words wanted here. We only ask to seize and be seized swiftly, over-masteringly, by the great meanings. We see with the eyes of the soul, listen with the ears of the soul; the poor old words that have served so many generations for purposes, good, bad, and indifferent, and become warped and blurred in the process, grow young again, regenerate, translucent. It is not mere delight they give us,--that the "sweet singers," with their subtly wrought gifts, their mellifluous speech, can give too in their degree; it is such life and health as enable us to pluck delights for ourselves out of every hour of the day, and taste the sunshine that ripened the corn in the crust we eat (I often seem to myself to do that).

Out of the scorn of the present came skepticism; and out of the large, loving acceptance of it comes faith. If now is so great and beautiful, I need no arguments to make me believe that the nows of the past and of the future were and will be great and beautiful, too.

"I know I am deathless.

I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by the carpenter's compass.

I know I shall not pass, like a child's carlacue cut with a burnt stick
at night.

I know I am august.

I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood.

"My foothold is tenoned and mortised in granite:

I laugh at what you call dissolution,

And I know the amplitude of Time."

"No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God and Death."

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 impossible. Far more beautiful care than man is aware of has been taken in the making of her, to fit her to be his mate. God has taken such care that he need take none; none, that is, which consists in disguisement, insincerity, painful hushing-up of his true, grand, initiating nature. And, as regards the poet's utterances, which, it might be thought, however harmless in themselves, would prove harmful by falling into the hands of those for whom they are manifestly unsuitable, I believe that even here fear is needless. For her innocence is folded round with such thick folds of ignorance, till the right way and time for it to accept knowledge, that what is unsuitable is also unintelligible to her; and, if no dark shadow from without be cast on the white page by misconstruction or by foolish mystery and hiding away of it, no hurt will ensue from its passing freely through her hands.

This is so, though it is little understood or realized by men. Wives and mothers will learn through the 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.

One of the hardest things to make a child understand is, that down

underneath your feet, if you go far enough, you come to blue sky and stars again; that there really is no "down" for the world, but only in every direction an "up." And that this is an all-embracing truth, including within its scope every created thing, and, with deepest significance, every part, faculty, attribute, healthful impulse, mind, and body of a man (each and all facing towards and related to the Infinite on every side), is what we grown children find it hardest to realize, too. Novalis said, "We touch heaven when we lay our hand on the human body"; which, if it mean anything, must mean an ample justification of the poet who has dared to be the poet of the body as well as of the soul,--to treat it with the freedom and grandeur of an ancient sculptor.

"Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy of the muse:--I say the form complete is worthier far.

"These are not parts and poems of the body only, but of the soul.

"O, I say now these are soul."

But while Novalis--who gazed at the truth a long way off, up in the air, in a safe, comfortable, German fashion--has been admiringly quoted by high authorities, the great American who has dared to rise up and wrestle with it, and bring it alive and full of power in the midst of us, has been greeted with a very different kind of reception, as has happened a few times before in the world in similar cases. Yet I feel deeply persuaded that a perfectly fearless, candid, ennobling treatment of the life of the body (so inextricably intertwined with, so potent in its influence on the

life of the soul) will prove of inestimable value to all earnest and aspiring natures, impatient of the folly of the long-prevalent belief that it is because of the greatness of the spirit that it has learned to despise the body, and to ignore its influences; knowing well that it is, on the contrary, just because the spirit is not great enough, not healthy and vigorous enough, to transfuse itself into the life of the body, elevating that and making it holy by its own triumphant intensity; knowing, too, how the body avenges this by dragging the soul down to the level assigned itself. Whereas the spirit must lovingly embrace the body, as the roots of a tree embrace the ground, drawing thence rich nourishment, warmth, impulse. Or, rather, the body is itself the root of the soul--that whereby it grows and feeds. The great tide of healthful life that carries all before it must surge through the whole man, not beat to and fro in one corner of his brain.

"O the life of my senses and flesh, transcending my senses and flesh!"

For the sake of all that is highest, a truthful recognition of this life, and especially of that of it which underlies the fundamental ties of humanity--the love of husband and wife, fatherhood, motherhood--is needed. Religion needs it, now at last alive to the fact that the basis of all true worship is comprised in "the great lesson of reception, neither preference nor denial," interpreting, loving, rejoicing in all that is created, fearing and despising nothing.

"I accept reality, and dare not question it."

The dignity of a man, the pride and affection of a woman, need it too. And so does the intellect. For science has opened up such elevating views of the mystery of material existence that, if poetry had not bestirred herself to handle this theme in her own way, she would have been left behind by her plodding sister. Science knows that matter is not, as we fancied, certain stolid atoms which the forces of nature vibrate through and push and pull about; but that the forces and the atoms are one mysterious, imperishable identity, neither conceivable without the other. She knows, as well as the poet, that destructibility is not one of nature's words; that it is only the relationship of things--tangibility, visibility--that are transitory. She knows that body and soul are one, and proclaims it undauntedly, regardless, and rightly regardless, of inferences. Timid onlookers, aghast, think it means that soul is body--means death for the soul. But the poet knows it means body is soul--the great whole imperishable; in life and in death continually changing substance, always retaining identity. For, if the man of science is happy about the atoms, if he is not baulked or baffled by apparent decay or destruction, but can see far enough into the dimness to know that not only is each atom imperishable, but that its endowments, characteristics, affinities, electric and other attractions and repulsions--however suspended, hid, dormant, masked, when it enters into new combinations--remain unchanged, be it for thousands of years, and, when it is again set free, manifest themselves in the old way, shall not the poet be happy about the vital whole? shall the highest force, the vital, that controls and compels into complete subservience for its own purposes the rest, be the only one that is destructible? and the love and thought that endow the whole be less enduring than the gravitating,

chemical, electric powers that endow its atoms? But identity is the essence of love and thought--I still I, you still you. Certainly no man need ever again be scared by the "dark hush" and the little handful of refuse.

"You are not scattered to the winds--you gather certainly and safely around yourself."

"Sure as Life holds all parts together, Death holds all parts together."

"All goes onward and outward: nothing collapses."

"What I am, I am of my body; and what I shall be, I shall be of my body."

"The body parts away at last for the journeys of the soul."

Science knows that whenever a thing passes from a solid to a subtle air, power is set free to a wider scope of action. The poet knows it too, and is dazzled as he turns his eyes toward "the superb vistas of death." He knows that "the perpetual transfers and promotions" and "the amplitude of time" are for a man as well as for the earth. The man of science, with unwearied, self-denying toil, finds the letters and joins them into words. But the poet alone can make complete sentences. The man of science furnishes the premises; but it is the poet who draws the final conclusion. Both together are "swiftly and surely preparing a future greater than all the past." But, while the man of science bequeaths to it the fruits of

his toil, the poet, this mighty poet, bequeaths himself--"Death making him really undying." He will "stand as high as the highest" to these men and women. For he taught them, in words which breathe out his very heart and soul into theirs, that "love of comrades" which, like the "soft-born measureless light," makes wholesome and fertile every spot it penetrates to, lighting up dark social and political problems, and kindling into a genial glow that great heart of justice which is the life-source of Democracy. He, the beloved friend of all, initiated for them a "new and superb friendship"; whispered that secret of a godlike pride in a man's self, and a perfect trust in woman, whereby their love for each other, no longer poisoned and stifled, but basking in the light of God's smile, and sending up to him a perfume of gratitude, attains at last a divine and tender completeness. He gave a faith-compelling utterance to that "wisdom which is the certainty of the reality and immortality of things, and of the excellence of things." Happy America, that he should be her son! One sees, indeed, that only a young giant of a nation could produce this kind of greatness, so full of the ardour, the elasticity, the inexhaustible vigour and freshness, the joyousness, the audacity of youth. But I, for one, cannot grudge anything to America. For, after all, the young giant is the old English giant--the great English race renewing its youth in that magnificent land, "Mexican-breathed, Arctic-braced," and girding up its loins to start on a new career that shall match with the greatness of the new home.