

NOTES AND FRAGMENTS

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Notes and fragments by Walt Whitman & Richard Maurice Bucke

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WALT WHITMAN & RICHARD MAURICE BUCKE

NOTES AND FRAGMENTS

NOTES AND FRAGMENTS: LEFT BY WALT
WHITMAN AND NOW EDITED BY DR. RICHARD
MAURICE BUCKE, ONE OF HIS LITERARY EX-
ECUTORS.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

"Waifs from the deep cast high and dry."

-Leaves of Grass, p. 278.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE.

AS ONE of Walt Whitman's literary executors there came to me under his will: (1) Letters from himself to his mother written from Washington in war-time (1862-5) and which have lately been published by Small, Maynard & Co. under the title of "The Wound-Dresser." (2) Many hundred letters written by members of the Whitman family to one another, as letters from Mrs. Whitman to W. W., Mrs. Heyde etc., letters from George, Jeff, Mary, Hannah etc. to Mrs. Whitman, and so on. All these letters had been preserved by Mrs. Whitman and upon her death in 1873 passed to Walt Whitman, who, a very sick man at the time and for long afterwards, simply let them lie in old boxes and bundles until at his death they passed to the present editor. (3) Quite a number of books from Whitman's library, many of them annotated by the poet. (4) A great mass of MS., the bulk of which is printed in this volume—a good deal of the rest is of an autobiographical character and is reserved for a new edition of my "Walt Whitman" or to be used in publications supplemental to that volume. (5) The magazine articles and newspaper cuttings enumerated in Part VI. of this volume.

Each of the other two literary executors took under the poet's will the same amount of material as myself, so it will be seen that these MS. remains were quite extensive, and judging by the careless, haphazard manner of their preservation it would seem certain that more must have been lost than were left in existence at the time of the poet's death.

These facts and considerations (when we join to them others equally well known and obvious, as that he knew the Bible, Shakespeare and Homer almost by heart) bring out pretty clearly the extraordinary industry of this man, who has generally been considered as easy-going, careless, idle, even "a loafer," but who must have been, in fact, though almost in secret, one of the most indefatigable workers who ever lived even in America.

For it must be remembered that from childhood he not only had to make his own living by actual daily work (tending office, typesetting, school teaching, editing newspapers, carpentering, house-building) but all his life, after early youth, he assisted in the maintenance of other members of the family. And besides all this, consider the time taken up by his numerous friendships—his frequent trips into the country, his sails on the bay with pilots, fishermen and others, the many hours spent on the ferry boats and omnibusses, and later his work in the hospitals. But (though it often seems almost or quite miraculous) Walt Whitman always had time and always had money for all his purposes.

The notes printed in this volume came to me in scrapbooks and in bundles. They are all on loose sheets and small pieces of paper of endless sizes, shapes, shades and qualities, (some even written on the back of scraps of wall-paper!). Sometimes they are pasted in a scrapbook but more often stuck in loose, or (as said) tied in bundles. In both the scrapbooks and bundles the MS. notes are mixed with the magazine articles and the newspaper cuttings. These notes, cuttings etc. extend from the forties down to the seventies or eighties—they belong very largely to the fifties.

Every word printed in the body of this book (except in the sixth part, which contains the list of magazine articles and newspaper cuttings and excepting also headings and footnotes) is before me in the handwriting of Walt Whitman. When a passage has been quoted by him the quotation marks are preserved. Any words of explanation added by me are given in footnotes and in a smaller type so that my words can never be confounded with Whitman's.

As there are some to-day so it seems likely that in the future there will be many for whom the study of Walt Whitman will possess a singular fascination. All such will desire not only to know the poetry and prose that he left behind him in print but will want, even more, to know whence and how this came. And above all they will desire to know as much as possible of the man himself, of his spiritual genesis and of his mental evolution. To such the present record of the early ideas and impulses out of which his mature works grew, as giving an insight which nothing else could afford, will be warmly welcomed and will seem at least as important as the finished works themselves. To receive this information with absolute authenticity—not only in Whitman's own hand but from documents absolutely private and never intended for any eye but his own—seems to me a piece of extraordinary good fortune.

It is made as good as certain by these notes that Whitman's original thought was to publish his ideas in the form of lectures. I believe he had formed this intention some years before such a book as "Leaves of Grass" was planned or even thought of. Nor did he drop the notion of lecturing as an integral part of his scheme of self-presentation after he began to write the "Leaves," but held to it certainly until after the war. It is even likely that the apparent impossibility of ever really publishing his verse even after this was printed in '55 and '56 (for the copies of these early editions could neither be sold nor given away) caused him more than ever to turn his thoughts to the lecture platform.

Be this as it may the present volume shows conclusively that Whitman planned, and at least partly wrote, lectures before he began to write the "Leaves," and that he continued to plan and to work at lectures, at least at intervals, almost all the rest of his life.

Whitman, like Bacon, took "all knowledge for his province" though he would perhaps attach a slightly different meaning to that expression. In any case he aimed to know as far as possible all there was to be learned. It is both interesting and instructive to observe how he sought to carry out his scheme of self-education. One of the means he employed, a means that, in part, gave material for this volume and is therefore mentioned here, was as follows: He took a work on universal geography—divided it into pieces of some fifty pages each; between these pieces he distributed numerous extra maps, a large quantity of blank paper (about equal in quantity to that printed upon) and every dozen or so leaves a number of stub leaves—then had the whole bound into a big, thick volume, which was so made as to open very freely. This volume he studied and kept continually adding to. To the stubs and on the blank leaves he pasted newspaper and magazine pieces—each one in its proper place,—those relating to Italy, Greece, Asia Minor etc. would be pasted in so as to fill out and complete the text. Then when he met a man who had traveled he got from him all he could, wrote out an abstract of it and placed that in its proper place in the book. In this way he constructed a volume which was a storehouse of information (geographical, ethnological, social, religious, industrial etc.) dealing with all parts of the world and the inhabitants of each part.

Other of his scrapbooks were good-sized volumes of blank paper intermixed with stub leaves—into these he collected—some loose, some pinned, and others pasted in—newspaper cuttings and magazine articles, MS. notes being added either written on the margin of magazine articles, on the leaves of the scrapbook or on loose paper which was either pinned or pasted in, or in many instances simply placed between the leaves of the book.

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PART I.

FIRST DRAFTS AND REJECTED LINES AND PASSAGES, MOSTLY VERY FRAGMENTARY,
FROM "LEAVES OF GRASS," LARGELY ANTECEDENT TO
THE 1855 EDITION.

I

I AM become a shroud ;
I wrap a body and lie in the coffin with it.

It is dark there underground ;
It is not evil or pain there, it is the absence of all that is good.

Now it seems to me that everything in the light above must be happy,
Whoever is not in his coffin, and the dark grave let him know he has enough.

The retrospective ecstasy is upon me, now my spirit burns volcanic ;
The earth recedes ashamed before my prophetic crisis.*

2

Osirus—to give forms.

I am he who finds nothing more divine than simple and natural things are divine.

3

Remembrances I plant American ground with,
Lessons to think I scatter as they come.
I perceive that myriads of men and women never think,
I perceive that e'er visible effects can come, thought must come,
I perceive that sages, poets, inventors, benefactors, lawgivers, are only those who
have thought,
That maugre all differences of ages and lands they differ not,
That what they leave is the common stock of the race.

* Written on same leaf, but see "Leaves of Grass," Song of Myself, S. 25, line 13, and The Sleepers
S. 2, '55 edition, pp. 31 and 72, and current edition, pp. 50 and 327.

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4

You villain, touch! . . . What are you doing?
Unloose me, the breath is leaving my throat;
Open your floodgates! You are too much for me.

Grip'd wrestler! do you keep the heaviest pull for the last?
Must you bite with your teeth at parting?

Will you struggle worst? I plunge you from the threshold.

Does it make you ache so to leave me!

Take what you like, I can resist you;
Take the tears of my soul if that is what you are after.

Pass to some one else;
Little as your mouth, it has drained me dry of my strength.*

5

Asia, steppes, the grass, the winter appearances,
The Tartar life, Nomadic pasturage, the herds,
The tabounshic or horse-herd. (taboun, a herd of horses),
The oxen, cows, women preparing milk.

I am a Russ, an arctic sailor, I traverse the sea of Kara,
A Kamskatkan on my slight-built sledge, drawn by dogs.

The ancient Hindostanee with his deities.

The great old Empire of India; that of Persia and its expeditions and conquests;
The Sanskrit—the ancient poems and laws;
The idea of Gods incarnated by their avatars in man and woman;
The falling of the waters of the Ganges over the high rim of Saukara;
The poems descended safely to this day from poets of three thousand years ago.†

6

And the tough Scotch sailor crosses the minch to the Hebrides,
And the Orkney boy and the Shetland boy wonder at that distant world they hear
of, yet love their rude cold island forever.‡

* Cf. "Leaves of Grass," '55 edition, p. 33, and current edition, p. 53.

† Cf. "Leaves of Grass," '56 edition. "Poem of Salutation," p. 103, et. seq., and current edition, p. 115.

‡ Left out of "Poem of Salutation," '56 edition.

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7

And the canny Caledonian thrives and thinks anywhere between Solway Firth and Noss Head.*

8

And as the shores of the sea I live near and love are to me, so are the shores of all the seas of the earth to those who live near and love them.
And as the mountains of my land are to me, so are the Alps, Pyrenees, the Styrian hills, Carnacks, Balks, Sedletz mountains, to the people of those lands.*

9

You stayer by the Shannon, the Dee, the Trent, the Severn, or goer from thence,
You tough sailor crossing the minch to your Hebrides,
You Orkney boy and Shetland boy,
You Spaniard of Spain, you Portuguese, you Swiss.*

10

All have come out of us, and all may return to us—they are ours.

11

A soprano heard at intervals over the immense waves,
Audible these from the underlying chorus,
Occupants and joyous vibraters of space.†

12

As we are content and dumb the amount of us in men and women is content and dumb,
As we cannot be mistaken at last, they cannot be mistaken.

13

Never fails the combination,
An underlying chorus, occupant and joyous vibrater of space.
A clear transparent base that lusciously shudders the universe,
A tenor strong and ascending, with glad notes of morning—with power and health.‡

* Left out of "Poem of Salutation," '56 edition.

† Cf. "Leaves of Grass," '55 edition, p. 32, and current edition, p. 51.

‡ Cf. "Leaves of Grass," '55 edition, p. 32, and current edition, p. 51.