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A Study of Walt Whitman,

THE POET OF MODERN DEMOCRACY.

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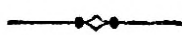

PART I.

I had just been reading Whitman for the first time, when I took up a weekly review, which always speaks, if not as one having, yet as one assuming to have, authority; and there I found it stated that Walt Whitman was an obscure impostor, and that his poetry was no better than Miss Codger's prose. I had thought otherwise; but upon a diffident person this unhesitating deliverance from our weekly oracle of critical revelation might well have a staggering effect. Not very long after, however, I read in the same literary arbiter, which so thoroughly fills among us the functions of any possible Academy (what could Mr. Arnold and Mr. Froude have been thinking about when they sighed for one?), that Charles Dickens was a rather inferior writer, a sort of Bavius or Mævius of his day, at least if compared with Mr. Tennyson. Upon this, I felt that the critic was speaking out of a sphere so entirely away from and elevated above mine, that, until he should have communicated his own superior nature to me, I must remain totally incapable of profiting by his revelations. Not without many a qualm, therefore, I betook myself again to my own feeble lights, having really for the nonce nothing better that I could look to.

To me, then, I will begin by owning at the outset, Walt Whitman appears as one of the largest and most important figures of the time. Of those who have publicly expressed a somewhat similar conviction, may be mentioned Mr. Rossetti, Mr. Conway, Mr. Robert Buchanan, and (I believe) Mr. Swinburne.

I think that what delights and arrests one most is the general impression he gives of nature, strength, health, individuality—his relish of all life is so keen, intense, catholic—the grasp of his faith is so nervous and tremendous—as he says, 'My feet are tenon'd and mortis'd in granite.' One of the notes of a man of genius is, that through life he remains a child; and there is something eminently childlike in Whitman. He is full of naïf wonder and delight—each thing, every

time he looks upon it, flashes upon him with a sense of eternal freshness and surprise; nor is anything to him common or unclean; but an aerial glory, as of morning, utterly insensible to vulgar eyes, bathes and suffuses all. He is tall, colossal, luxuriant, unpruned, like some giant tree in a primeval forest, whose feet root profoundly in a virgin soil. He springs out of that vast American continent full-charged with all that is special and national in it, in a supereminent degree representative of all that is richest and most fresh in that American life which, more fully than any other, embodies the present age's own individual life. He is very far from being hopeless and disdainful of his time; he does not, as many really great writers of his country have done, prefer distant lands, enriched with long and eventful histories, for his theme; he takes his own country and his own time, however ignoble they may seem to some fastidious tastes; he is by no means himself uninfluenced by the special errors and special weaknesses of these; but he is withal magnificently pregnant with all a seer's half-articulate previsions, with all a prophet's triumphant anticipations of that larger and more generous human future which is surely about to issue out of these travailing loins and from these most ominous birthpangs of the present. He is American democracy incarnate; and however much that leaves to be desired, yet it is great. As Mr. Buchanan has already remarked, he is more prophet than artist. He very seldom retires to create deliberate imaginative wholes, in whose many diverse forms may be deposited the truths he sees and must utter, the mastering emotions which dominate his soul. You never cease to see this man Walt Whitman. But then it is a very noble, and I contend a very poetic, personality you see—one in which, as in a magic crystal, all these men and women of the world, all the sights of city and of landscape, find themselves mirrored with most astonishing distinctness. He is too eager, too excited, to linger and to weave artistic poems out of his materials; yet in the flash of the dark-lantern he turns upon them for a moment as he passes, though they too often appear isolated and disjunct, they dart out upon you with all the marvellous solidity and reality which their images have in nature. It is certainly a poet's glance which has been poured upon them—piercing, remaking them; not the glance of an analyst, a practical man, or one apathetic and indifferent. It is always one of intense enjoyment, from complete vision of the essence and heart of a thing. And this atmosphere of keen buoyant personal sympathy and pleasure is more marked in Whitman than in anyone else, and is wonderfully bracing and refreshing to breathe. All the stale heaps of common, familiar things seem to leap up into their proper vitality as he passes: they glow like dingy metal filings in some electric light. And if he were otherwise, more of an ordinary artist, we should lose this refreshing novel sense of intense yet catholic and *impersonal personality* which is so eminently characteristic of Walt Whitman. He seems to revel in his own life, and

equally in that of every man, woman, and child he meets or can imagine. And now that so many people say and sing that they are weary and tired and despairing, that the world is worn out, and that you must go back to the classics or mediæval themes for any objects of warm poetic interest, that life now is 'a suck and a sell, and its end a bit of threadbare crape,' this spectacle of a poet and a man like a very child rejoicing in all the teeming forces and energies of this vulgar world of ours—this surely is something at least novel and 'sensational.'

True it is, however, that Whitman comes of the people; his past life has been active, adventurous, healthy, varied, and broadly human in experience. He dare not set himself above them, above the meanest of them, and look down from a height serenely benevolent upon them; he claims to be one with them; and what he sees more vividly than they, glories in more supremely, is—that he is, not an elect, a very intellectual or refined man, but a man, and has men and women for brothers and sisters. This honest and unfeigned use of greatness in rendering service rather than in exacting it—in pouring self out for the enrichment of mankind rather than in cunningly playing upon the weaknesses of mankind for one's own glory—this is after the ancient type of heroism, after Christ, 'friend of publicans and sinners,' the Divinest Son of Man, who 'drew all men to Himself;' and one can well understand the personal fascination and influence which we are informed Whitman is exercising upon so many of the youth of America. The life familiar to him is the picturesque, free, unconventional life of the people—not the pale monotonous artificial life of literary student, aristocrat, or plutocrat. He enters profoundly into all their difficulties, enjoyments, sorrows, and eager aspirations. Then, too, he has been in the great civil war, and been keenly penetrated with the noblest (as well as the less noble, but still powerfully human) of its principles and ideas. And in that war he was present personally in the sublimest and most heroic of capacities—he ministered constantly to the wounded on both sides, on the field and in the hospital. Such a man, therefore, has had exceptional advantages as man—and the raw material being heroic, such is the result. We who stay at home in the old country, with old traditions and prejudices rank in our blood, nurtured under the grand yet somewhat chilling shadow of 'time-honoured institutions'—we cannot pretend to call ourselves men of the age as that man can call himself man of the age. But of book-learning, of refined inherited culture-inculcated accents, words, and ways, this man has probably little—so far, he has not, perhaps, had all advantages, though, whether they would not have cramped and injured *him*, is to me very questionable.

There are those, I know, who affirm that a poet can never (except quite indirectly) be a teacher or a prophet. This is again a critical dictum so removed from me that I do not pretend to understand it. I should have thought it depended on *how* he taught and prophesied—

whether in doing so his whole nature was a-fire or not, his imagination and his heart all a-glow about the chariot way of his reason; for otherwise Isaiah and Jeremiah, Lucretius and Shelley, would be no poets, which on the whole I rather take leave to doubt. But it resolves itself of course into a dispute about words.

If, again, a poet must necessarily mean a metrist after our established English models, certainly Whitman is none. His expression indeed must be admitted to be often slovenly, inadequate, clumsy, and harsh; sometimes even stilted, bombastic, and inflated. But it is very far from uniformly or generally this. I read indeed in the same review of which I have before so reverently spoken, how it was now an axiom unquestioned by any judicious person that subject-matter in poetry was nothing, and style, expression, was everything. I felt terribly disconcerted at *always* having to believe exactly the opposite of all that is so categorically and without argument laid down by this our supreme authority in matters critical; but really that did seem startling to the uninitiated mind. Whether a poet has anything to say, to bring out, to express, is of no consequence whatsoever. Whether it be nothing or something, whether it be nonsense or wisdom, whether it be empty wind or inspired revelations, gibberings of an idiot, pulings of a sentimentalist, or utterances of sublime imagination and divine passion—all this is of absolutely no account; if only there be sibilants and labials and rotundities of sound in the slipping of any or of either of these things off the tongue, he who gives vent to them is a poet, in either case equally a poet; but if there be not quite enough of these sounds, whatever else there be, by no means and on no account a poet. Well, then, must not musical glasses be a poet? And since it would certainly be possible to weave intricacies of sound more exquisite and more varied by discarding altogether that old-fashioned hampering obligation of conceiving, imagining, and feeling with strength sustained enough to keep coherence, harmony, and distinctness among the ideal links we weave, would it not on these principles be well to lay down *ex cathedrâ* the grand, if novel axiom, that true poetry can only and shall only consist of nonsense verses? On the contrary, I venture to believe that expression implies meanings to be expressed, and that the most perfect expression is that which most transparently and impressively fits and shows off the meaning.

The charm of 'Don Juan' is surely in that wonderful adaptation of the metre to all clear, luscious beauty of the pictures, all free, incommoded movements of the story, all sparkling turns of the satire, the humour, and the wit; there is here no deliberate concoction of 'blessed words like Mesopotamia,' no triumphant exultation in the invention of novel tricks for saying ordinary things that must be said in a roundabout, coxcombical, and unintelligible manner, which now (as in the days of Euphues and Darwin) appears to be considered the one essential of great poetry. Wordsworth hoped vainly that he had

refuted that. I refuse to call him a great master of expression with whom words, whether in prose or verse, are not before all a medium of meaning; if they are employed with all manner of tricks and artifice, primarily for their own sakes, and the meaning has very much to take its chance of sanity and wholeness among them (the effect being that of a kaleidoscope, where bright broken fragments of ideas keep shifting their combinations in an endless and bewildering fashion), whatever the music of the sound be, it is not good expression, but the very worst. Poetry in this case usurps the place of music, for words can never be mere sound, but always must remain symbolic sound with a determined meaning. Just so precisely the latest fashion in music usurps the place of language and stultifies the very idea and specific difference of music, which implies sound for its own sake, spiritual suggestion only indirect and indefinite: a similar remark applies to the last fashion in painting.

Shelley himself, for example, wonderful poet as he is, was often carried into totally inadequate expression by his exquisite ear for melodious sound. His melody and harmony are glorious when they rise spontaneously into heaven, immediately responsive to the soaring and expanding impulse within, wholly obedient to the burst of impetuous imagination, to the divine stress and swell of immense human sympathies.

But of a poet—a maker, a seer, a singer—must first of all be demanded if he can make and feel and see; then afterwards, if he can sing. Yet the chances are that if he answer 'yes' to the first question, you are almost safe in leaving the other unasked. It is the very meaning and essence of poetry that a man who can make in the region of the ideal, who can feel and imagine (unless he be by nature impelled to some other than verbal form of plastic expression), will necessarily be driven to some form of rhythmical utterance. I do not depreciate the most gifted in the region of melodious metrical expression. I glorify them. If they have other things yet more essential, they are by far the most perfect of our poets; only Byron and Wordsworth, whose melody was less perfect than that of Shelley or Coleridge, cannot on that account be placed below the latter as poets; for they have abundantly filled for us vast spaces in the area of poetry which could not have been filled without them. They have ideal treasures not to be found in their contemporaries. What were the early rhapsodists, the story-tellers, ballad-intoners, bards, of an infant people? It is generally conceded that poetry among these is of the purest and freshest. Yet what do they know of our elaborate involutions of phrase-mongering? Therefore, especially do I welcome Whitman. In spite of all his faults, he brings us back to the matrix, to common sense and common nature, and makes us feel what poetry originally, what at the root of the matter poetry even now, really means and ought to mean. He is not himself indeed always an artist, a poet; but he is often a very great poet; and when he is, he shows himself to be one, because he must be, not because he would like to be, and can mimic those who are. He chants, declaims; *when*

his soul and subject bid him, he sings, quite in his own fashion, as the poets of a primitive people do.

After all, it is rarely that you find all poetic gifts perfectly balancing one another in any poet whatever. Nor can I concede for a moment that deficiency in the region of large vivid insight, affluent imagination, broad human sympathy, or rush and fire of passion, can be more perfectly atoned for by verbal daintiness and skill, or by a fine ear for verbal music, than some defect in these last gifts can be by possession on the part of a poet of those ideal gifts in ampler measure. Indeed, I distinctly believe that the contrary rather is true. There is more hope that a poet may be cured of hesitating utterance than that a mere voluble versifier may sober and strengthen into a poet.

We did want some infusion of robuster and healthier blood among the pallid civilised brotherhood of our poets. If admirers arise who strive to imitate Whitman's gait and form, they will probably make themselves ridiculous, puff themselves out and collapse; yet will he certainly give our jaded literature the prick and fillip that it needed. He at any rate is no closet-warbler, trilling delicately after the music of other singers, having merely a few thin thoughts and emotions only a quarter his own and a clever aptitude for catching the tricks of another man's manner.

He bears, however, a marvellous resemblance (I often think) to Oriental prophets. He is in manner of life, as well as manner of thought, feeling, temperament, marvellously like a reincarnation over there in the West of that special principle of personality which has been so much more frequently manifested in the East—in Derwîshes, for instance, and Sufis. He has so thoroughly assimilated Bible poetry on account of his profound personal identity with the writers of it. Yet is he very un-Hebrew after all. He is more Egyptian, Persian, Indian. Pantheist is he to the back bone; a nature worshipper, seeing God everywhere—God in all, even the meanest thing; bowing before good and evil as integral and correlative elements in the universal scheme of things, all going (as Hegel demonstrates) by the principle of identity in contraries. He is a desperate and shameless assertor of the sacredness of the flesh, the body, beauty of form and colour, and the fleshly instincts. This he is (let us freely admit and regret) wantonly, inartistically coarse in asserting; unutterably shocking of course to those who are unutterably shocked with nature for making us of flesh at all, and who hold that the only way to remedy her immodest mistake is to hush the fact up altogether.

The passages most capable of giving deep and permanent delight to lovers of poetry in all ages are certainly those in which a profound soul-moving spiritual signification rises without let or hindrance into that perfect rhythmic cadence which is proper to it. Here doubtless a careful training of the organ of expression has its place, as well as a fine original instinct for expression, and a genius for grandeur and

melody of sound. In proportion to the completeness, magic suggestiveness, and special beauty of sound concordant with idea and feeling, will be the penetration and lingeringly-inherent power of the poem. But the condition implied is that the sound be verily an echo, a reduplication of the sense. In that wonderful music of Coleridge's 'Ode to France' there is all the still floating of cloud, the long roll of wave, the solemn music of wind and swinging pine by night. In 'Lewti,' the delicious, how the mellow ripple of verse in its own 'meandering mazes' reflects and multiplies for ever that gleam of river-swans and the river! A marvellous and mysterious fellowship among sights and sounds makes such a marrying of them attainable. Not only is the word *thunder* next of kin to the very roll of sound in heaven, but very twins also are *blitz* and the flash that blinds. The name *gleaming* gently soothes the ear, even as soft tender light does the eye. And when the whole subject has a pervading tone, a characteristic movement, be it rapid tumultuous rush, solemn imperial march, pathetic pause, or tripping buoyancy of the dance, then must the true poet's measure breathe antiphonal response in the music. Take Shelley's marvellously lovely prophetic chorus in 'Hellas,' or the splendid music of his eagle-chorus in the same; out of Byron take the stern, sad warrior-lilt of his 'Isles of Greece;' out of Burns the abrupt exulting tramp, the clarion and the battle-shout of 'Scots, wha hae.'

But in no case can I find that any great poets made poetry to consist in mere ingenious allurements for the ear, busied themselves first of all about this, and let the spiritual fire fall into the midst of their word-altar if it would, or if it could. Alas! how often it will not, though the priests of Ashtaroth cry aloud, and leap, and cut themselves with knives!

Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan,' exquisite for music, even in spite of the line which brings in that 'blessed word' *Mount Abora*, is far too shadowy a vision from opium-land to be permanently remembered, as 'Christabel' or the 'Mariner' may be. To my mind, that sweetest little bit, called the 'Knight's Grave,' is, for atmosphere of tender sentiment, undefined yet far-reaching and profound, suffusing picture, thought, and melody alike (surely the melody is magical to a degree), worth many 'Kubla Khans' and similar pieces, arresting only or almost only from the music of the syllables.

So much I thought it well to premise, because in a day which has seen really beautiful artificial melodies in poetry brought to a pitch of rare perfection, the rough untutored guise of Walt Whitman's muse is likely to prove the most serious obstacle of all to any cardinal justice being done to his high poetic genius.

Yet in Whitman we shall often recognise that nobler kind of music which is bound up with a poet's language as a more thorough and effectual expression of thought, image, and feeling.

Turn, first, to his beautiful lament for the death of Lincoln, 'When lilacs last in the door-yard bloomed':

> Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp in the dimness,
> To the solemn shadowy cedars and ghostly pines so still.
>
> And the singer so shy to the rest received me,
> The gray-brown bird I know received us comrades three,
> And he sang what seemed the song of Death, and a verse for him I love
>
> Come, lovely and soothing Death!
> Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
> In the day in the night, to all to each,
> Sooner or later, delicate Death!
>
> Praised be the fathomless universe
> For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,
> And for love, sweet love. But praise! O praise and praise
> For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding Death!
>
> . . . .
>
> Yet each I keep and all,
> The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,
> And the tallying chant, the echo aroused in my soul,
> With the lustrous and drooping star, with the countenance full of woe,
> With the lilac tall, and its blossoms of mastering odour.
>
> For the dead I loved so well,
> For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands . . .
> And this for his dear sake.
> Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,
> With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of the bird,
> There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.

Note here, too, the creation of a simple beautiful whole—a few ordinary sights, scents, and sounds, flowing quietly as by accident into his soul, and there taking a solemn tinge from the sublime atmosphere of a manly grief ready to kindle into the gladness of a triumphant faith—but nothing forced, nothing strained, nothing made up; these messengers from without just taking on an aspect of hallowed sympathy with the tone and temper of the soul they visit. I note this particularly as one instance out of many in Whitman, because what is most noticeable on the surface of him is a certain fragmentariness, a certain tendency to rush rapidly through a whole world of isolated details with an intensity of exhilaration, indeed, which is itself poetic, but which yet fails of creating high art, because there is no obvious wholeness, no sufficiently pervading idea or purpose to impart unity. It is not with him a question of painting a particular scene or even object with extraordinary lovingness and minuteness of touch, the whole being poetical because every touch helps to create, or indeed more strictly develop, a spiritual ideal of scene or thing by flashing upon the bare matter, as it appears to the cold unloving sense, a thousand tints and tones from kindred things

with which it has latent fellowship and sympathy. With Whitman rather, in such passages as offend many readers, it is a kind of rapid excited stride through brilliant but heterogeneous stalls of a great exhibition or bazaar, cataloguing objects with bare names as he goes.

And this is the notion he gives you always and everywhere. However barren, or even stammering and inadequate his naming and picturing, still he contrives to flash upon all a wonderful light of freshness, and glory, and triumph in the bare existence of all things, as he shoulders along, the great sane man, enjoying, praising, filled to the very brim, in an age of nervous hesitation, and question, and lamentation, with a faith as tremendous and unquenchable in the ultimate excellence and right of things as ever burned in prophet or saint of old. A faith not received by inheritance as an heirloom, and conventionally valued as a property, a propriety, a matter of course—but a faith grown out of the very roots and breadths of his own personality, and that the personality of a man who, with all reverence for the past, yet lives in, and assimilates the fresh results yielded by the present, sharing, according to the fuller measure of genius and unwonted human sympathy, the hopes and aspirations of his fellows for the future. His bright and large views of life may indeed be fairly attributed in some measure to his splendid health and physique, as Mr. Rossetti remarks. And I think this rapid, often unsatisfactory, nakedly prosaic cataloguing of innumerable isolated details, may be attributed largely also to the poet's exhilaration in the open air; he can hardly stop to meditate and get the precise character of the object opened out to him, he enjoys it so, and then so many other things everywhere press themselves on him to be noticed and enjoyed. In this respect, his fellowship with ordinary out-door, healthy men, his habit of loafing about and basking, does a serious injury to his artistic expression.

For it should be well understood that accuracy of detail may be either naked, cold, and mechanical, or intensely poetic because thoroughly spiritualised. It is unjust to apply the phrase '*photographic*' to this *last* kind of work. Coleridge and Keats always saw nature thus; Wordsworth's harder nature not perhaps always, though usually: and what I mean by the poetic vision is a more real and intense, by no means a less true, sight.

But generally Whitman's description appears to me thoroughly masterful. His epithets are few, yet precise and characteristic of the broad general image which a thing, a scene, casts upon a quick, passing, but piercing and sympathetic, observer. Thus:

In lower latitudes, in warmer air in the Carolinas, the large black buzzard floating slowly, high beyond the tree-tops;
Below the red cedar festooned with tylandia; the pines and cypresses
Growing out of the white sand, that spreads far and flat;
The waving drapery on the live oak, trailing long and low, noiselessly waved by the wind.'

But if Whitman be sometimes remarkable for incisive luminous distinctness of vision and keenness of all sensation, at other times he is no less remarkable for a certain magical, mysterious, half-Oriental, half-German mood that anon possesses him, vague and dim, tender, mournful, mystical.

'The Song of the Broad-axe' and 'Drum-taps' are poems that are almost all wholes—exquisite pictures drawn with a few broad telling touches, and exhaling the profoundest pathos, yet seldom morbid—a wind, as of bracing faith, blowing through all the sorrow and the horror; a bracing atmosphere of personal unselfish heroic endeavours, and most sterling human sympathy pervades them. On the 'Drum-taps' Whitman might be content to rest his fame with future generations. There is little philosophy or mysticism; there are few of those peculiarities in form or boldnesses of speech which shock people most—the art is certainly more perfect. There is here a definite theme through all the poems—the subject is large, grand, full of energy and strife, one for which Whitman's genius as well as personal experience eminently fits him. Have there ever been such a series of war poems written? I do not know of any. Here, however, not only the tender, loving, pathetic, as well as realistic and idyllic power of Whitman appears, but also his own ardent personal convictions, tastes, and aspirations, so that ever and anon he breaks into passages of tremendous lyric fire. And, except in that other great poetic figure of the day, Victor Hugo, I hardly know where we shall look in Europe for the like; for our verse does not excel now-a-days in *verve*, and fire, and rapid rush.[1] In that line is not the following magnificent?—

> Beat! beat! drums. Blow! bugles! blow!
> Make no parley—stop for no expostulation,
> Mind not the timid, mind not the weeper or prayer,
> Mind not the old man beseeching the young man,
> Let not the child's voice be heard nor the mother's entreaties,
> *Make even the trestles to shake the dead, where they lie awaiting the hearses,*
> So strong you thump, O terrible drums; so loud you bugles blow!

And in 'The Uprising,' you can hear the surge, and whirl, and shriek of the wind; the tremendous upheaval and welter of the sea; the deep gathering overwhelming roar of a roused and maddening multitude. Then 'The Song of the Banner' is all alive with spirit of battle. In the few lines 'The Flag' there is a wild fierce delight, electrically communicated, from the mere upheaval of a people *en masse* to fight, it scarcely matters why or for what.

'What we believe in invites no man, promises nothing, sits in

[1] I wish to state that this essay was written more than a year and a half ago, and has been lying by. I have since seen Mr. Swinburne's 'Songs before Sunrise,' many of which are all alive with resonant lyric fervour inspired by great human emotions.

calmness and light, is positive and composed, knows no discouragement, waiting patiently, waiting its time!' That to me is grand; he cannot define, will not pretend to explain precisely, the inevitable and Divine issue of all our strife, and hallowed endeavour and success, and failure—but It is there, in the Future, in the For ever; patient, silent, grand, adorable, inevitably To be.

The short, so perfect, pathetic pictures I spoke of in 'Drum-taps' are well worthy of study. 'A Letter from Camp,' is the simple relation of an affecting incident, without over-elaborate phrase, or prim precision of ornament, after the manner of idyls which become a little wearisome, but has the rare merit, for all its plain speech, of dropping directly into our hearts and remaining there.

'Vigil on the Field' is exquisite for tenderness, sadness, and large clear delineation of incident and scene. There is a rare freshness of personal feeling about that: the charm of it seems to me unutterable. He watches by a dying comrade whom he loved—a boy—on the field of battle, returns to find him dead, buries him in a blanket in a rude dug grave there. 'The Wounded' is another graphic picture. 'O tan-faced prairie-boy' and 'A Grave' are exquisite little sketches. 'Camps of Green,' too, is beautiful—the camps of the dead. So is the 'Dirge for Two Veterans' and the 'Hymn of Dead Soldiers:'

> Sweet are the blooming cheeks of the living, sweet are the musical voices sounding;
> But sweet, ah! sweet are the dead, with their silent eyes.

And what shall we say of this, called 'Reconciliation'?—

> Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
> Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost,
> That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly softly wash again and ever again this soiled world;
> For my enemy is dead—a man divine as myself is dead.
> I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin; I draw near,
> I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

Or of this?—He walks out in the dim gray daybreak, and sees three forms on stretchers, covered with gray heavy blankets. 'Curious I halt, and silent stand'—then he lifts one blanket:

> Who are you, elderly man, so gaunt and grim, with well-grayed hair, and flesh all sunken about the eyes? Who are you, my dear comrade?
> Then to the second I step—and who are you, my child and darling? Who are you, sweet boy with cheeks yet blooming?
> Then to the third—a face nor child nor old, very calm, as of beautiful yellow-white ivory,
> Young man, I think I know you. I think this face of yours is the face of the Christ himself;
> Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again he lies.

We would now, before passing to consider shortly the general character of Whitman's philosophy and teaching, draw closer attention

to the nature of his music. We take another instance from the poem, 'When lilacs last in the door-yard bloomed':

O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?
And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?
And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I love?

Seawinds blown from east and west,
Blown from the eastern sea, and blown from the western sea, till there on the prairies meeting:
These, and with these and the breath of my chant,
I perfume the grave of him I love.

O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?
And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,
To adorn the burial-house of him I love?

But of all our author's poems, surely the loveliest is 'A Song out of the Sea.' I only wish I could quote it whole, but it is too long. I hesitate not to say that to me there is no lyric in the language like it—out of Shelley.

There is a wonderful natural music running through this and similar poems of Whitman's: an outbreathing as in primitive times, and among a primitive people, that can come from nowhere but from the very depths of a poet's, a singer's soul. It is all his own—creation of spirit, body, vesture. He is intensely original; has not been imbued with the world's rich inheritance of treasured poetry: works under no strong (however flexible) traditions of art, speaks because he must, sings because he must; yet, with all his rare personal mass and intensity, sings only sometimes—would certainly sing more constantly did he condescend to condense and concentrate more; in which some respect for established forms would largely assist him. And yet in the links of poems where there is confessedly no intensity of fire possible, if at least we require that it shall be germane to the subjects, it is more than doubtful whether the poetic barrenness should be scattered over with sham flowers instead of real ones; as the established forms, or at least the standard poetry by which this English generation judges, appears to require. So you get either fine sound with no meaning whatever, or epithets ingeniously constructed in cold blood, which in either case seriously interferes with the natural and lifelike development of the poem. Pure honest prose, where prose is really proper, would be infinitely better.

However all this be, here, in the 'Song of the Sea,' and in similar passages from Whitman, you do assuredly find, if you are sensitive and competent, a certain artless harmony of sound that flows like a spell upon jaded ears, somewhat sated with cloying artificial harmonies from the study. One is reminded of some dreary nocturne, some slumbrous mystic voluntary breathed in twilight within a vast cathedral, or weird natural sounds we know not whence, wandering phantasmal over lowland wildernesses by night.

It is like the very voice of the sea himself, entangled in strings of the harper; into the strain has passed the very plaint and murmur of winds over barren sand and briny briar; rising alternately and falling; harsh, interrupted, disturbed; caught up unaware smooth and soothing; stealing upon us forlorn and melodious, from unfooted wastes, and shadowy realms of some spirit land that is very far.

Just two personification-pictures, eminently rich in colour, firm in outline, distinct and pregnant with symbol, yet small in compass and condensed. One is from 'Old Ireland':

> Far hence amid an isle of wondrous beauty,
> Crouching over a grave, an ancient sorrowful mother,
> Once a queen, now lean and tattered, seated on the ground;
> Her old white hair drooping dishevelled round her shoulders;
> At her feet an unused royal harp,
> Long silent—she too long silent—mourning her shrouded hope and heir:
> Of all the earth her heart most full of sorrow, because most full of love.

The other is from 'A Broadway Pageant,' written on occasion of the reception of a Japanese embassy:

> The Originatress comes,
> The land of Paradise—land of the Caucasus—the nest of birth,
> The nest of languages, the bequeather of poems, the race of Eld,
> Florid with blood, pensive, rapt with musings, hot with passion,
> Sultry with perfume, with ample and flowing garments,
> With sunburnt visage, with intense soul and glittering eyes,
> The race of Brahma comes!

[*To be continued.*]