

Coming with welcome at our journey's end;
For me Fate gave, whate'er she else denied,
A nature sloping to the southern side;
I thank her for it, though when clouds arise
Such natures double-darken gloomy skies.

Little I ask of Fate: will she refuse
Some days of reconciliation with the Muse?
I take my reed again and blow it free
Of dusty silence, murmuring, 'Sing to me!'

These lines describe his last years. He returned to poetry; he completed his 'Endymion,' which has in it a quality rare in Lowell's work, the poetic suggestion of more than is expressed; and he wrote some exquisite lyrics, with a lightness of touch he had not possessed before, and some poems full of his best strength, like those on 'Turner's Old Téméraire' and on Grant. His last years gave us also important addresses like those on 'The Independent in Politics,' and 'Our Literature,' and charming essays like that on 'Izaak Walton.' He died at Elmwood, August 12, 1891.

Lowell is the largest and best rounded personality that our literature yet possesses. He has unquestionably written our best literary essays, and perhaps also our best political essays in literary form. In his poetry he has all but surpassed the other poets, each in his own field. He is as true a nature poet as Bryant; though he has nothing to compare with the higher ranges of Bryant's nature poetry, like the 'Forest Hymn,' yet his treatment of Nature in her gentler aspects can well meet the comparison. 'To a Dandelion,' for instance, may be set beside 'To the Fringed Gentian.' What is more important, he writes of Nature with a happy intimacy which Bryant never had, as in the 'Indian Summer Reverie' and 'Sunthin' in the Pastoral Line,' and in many of the essays, like 'My Garden Acquaintance' and 'A Good Word for Winter.' There is a personal genuineness in his early work, especially the sonnets, which we do not find elsewhere except in Longfellow or Whittier, and in them it hardly has Lowell's deeper poetic quality; while in his later work, there is a high dignity which we do not find elsewhere except in Bryant. He is a true poet of New England country life, once at least, in 'The Courtin',' surpassing Whittier in his own field. He has written poems of sincere thought, though without the condensation and the fitness of form of Emerson at his best, in 'Bibliolatres,' 'The Lesson,' 'Masaccio,' 'The Miner,' 'Turner's Old Téméraire,' etc.; and these poems are somewhat more human in quality than Emerson's. He is our greatest humorist; the *Biglow Papers* have far broader and more significant power than the best of Holmes's humor, and the 'Fable for Critics' is almost as sparkling as the best wit of Holmes. If he is not a greater poet of occasions than Holmes, he is certainly a poet of greater occasions, and adequate to them. He has a lightness of touch in familiar verse that no one of our greater poets had (though it is to be found in Thomas Bailey Aldrich and others), as in 'Hebe,' 'The Pregnant Comment,' 'An Ember Picture' and 'Telepathy.' Yet there is something lacking in most of his work, something of charm, especially of rhythmic charm, something of poetic suggestiveness, something which he seems always striving after (see 'L'Envoi to the Muse,' 'Auspex,' and 'The Secret'), and which now and then he does almost attain, as in 'In the Twilight.' He lacks, usually, just that last touch of genius, that 'St. Elmo's Fire' playing over all, which he so well describes in his own essay on Keats. His life and character possessed something of this charm which did not quite get expression in his verse. He had a genius for friendship; he was one of the best talkers, and by far the best letter-writer, we have had; and we feel that uncaptured charm hovering near some of his poems of personal moods, like 'My Study Fire,' 'To Charles Eliot Norton,' or the 'Envoi to the Muse' and the others just mentioned. In personality, he was the fine flower of American society. Noble and varied as his verse is, he lived out his own motto, —

The Epic of a man rehearse,
Be something better than thy verse.

He is our noblest patriot-poet, and our most complete and well-rounded man.

WALT WHITMAN

WHITMAN, like Holmes, was of combined Connecticut and Dutch ancestry. His immediate ancestors, like Whittier's, were farmers, but more prosperous, his father owning five hundred acres of good land on Long Island, which Whitman preferred to call by its Indian name of Paumanok. His mother's family were also prosperous farmers. On his father's side, the first American ancestor, Rev. Zachariah Whitman, came to this country in 1635 and settled at Milford, Conn. In the last part of the seventeenth century Long Island was settled, largely from Connecticut, and the son of Rev. Zachariah Whitman crossed the Sound with the others. At about the same time Whitman's ancestors on his mother's side, a family of Dutch origin, the Van Velsors, settled in Long Island a little further to the west, nearer New York. There was also Quaker blood in Whitman's veins, coming from his maternal grandmother.

Whitman's father, Walter Whitman, was a carpenter and builder as well as a farmer, and lived at Huntington, Long Island. There Walt Whitman was born, May 31, 1819, the second of nine children. He was christened Walter, but to distinguish him from his father was called Walt, and he kept this name throughout his life. When he was four years old the family moved to Brooklyn, and there Walt attended the public schools. He was still almost as much a country as a city boy, however. He tells of his expeditions with his comrades on the ice of the Long Island bays in the winter, and of his own walks on the bare shores of Coney Island in summer, which then, he says, 'I had all to myself.' These expeditions to deserted Coney Island lasted until he was more than thirty years old, and he tells how, in its solitudes, he 'loved after bathing to race up and down the hard sand, and declaim Homer and Shakspeare to the surf and sea-gulls by the hour.' In 1833-34 he was in printing offices in Brooklyn, learning the trade, and until 1837 worked as compositor in Brooklyn and New York. For the following year or two he taught school in country towns on Long Island, and 'boarded round.' 'This,' he says, 'I consider one of my best experiences and deepest lessons in human nature behind the scenes and in the masses.' In the following year (1839-40), he started and published a weekly paper in his native town, probably doing both the writing and the typesetting himself. 'All these years,' he says, 'I was down Long Island more or less every summer, now east, now west, sometimes months at a stretch.' For the five years following 1840, all the time, and off and on for the next fifteen years, he lived winters in Brooklyn, working more or less as a compositor in New York city. He tells how his life was 'curiously identified with Fulton Ferry' (see the passage quoted in full in the note on 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry'), how he crossed almost daily, often in the pilot-house, familiar with all the pilots, as he was in New York with all the omnibus drivers, with whom he spent many hours riding the length of Broadway. He passionately loved the great city and its sights and its people, and no one has given so vivid a picture of it either in verse or in prose. He had a passion for music also, spent night after night at the opera, and went much to the theatre. In 1848-49 he was editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle*. He had written more or less since 1839 for newspapers and magazines, among others the *Democratic Review*. A few specimens of this early writing, both in prose and verse, are preserved in his *Complete Prose Works* (pages 334-374). The 'Dough-Face Song' is good ordinary rhyme, and in both substance and form reminds us a little of the first series of the *Biglow Papers*, though it is dated earlier. His prose, so far as preserved, consists of story-sketches, which hold the reader's interest but are in no way remarkable. Among other things he wrote at this time a temperance tract, *Franklin Evans*.

In 1849 he broke away from all regular employment, and started off on a leisurely and apparently purposeless excursion, which was to be of great importance in forming the character of his later work. He calls it 'a leisurely journey and working expedition.' It must be described in his own words of brief summary. He went, he says, with his brother Jeff, 'through all the Middle States, and down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Lived awhile in New Orleans, and work'd there on the editorial staff of "daily Crescent" news-

paper. After a time plodded back northward, up the Mississippi, and around to and by way of the Great Lakes, Michigan, Huron, and Erie, to Niagara falls and lower Canada, finally returning through central New York and down the Hudson; traveling altogether probably 8,000 miles this trip, to and fro.' From what we know of his life in New York and Brooklyn, we can infer what this expedition was to him. Speaking of the origin of *Leaves of Grass*, he once said, 'Remember, the book arose out of my life in Brooklyn and New York from 1838 to 1853, absorbing a million people, for fifteen years, with an intimacy, an eagerness, an abandon, probably never equalled.' With the same passion he must have absorbed the sights and the life of the country he passed through — almost the whole of the United States at that time — on this 8,000 mile excursion, making his own way, working here and there at his trade, living the life of the people. There are vivid reminiscences of the South constantly recurring in his later writing, as in the poem of the live-oak; and there is everywhere present the feeling of bigness, freedom, and heartiness, of the life of the West.

On his return, he took up for a little while his former occupations, editing and printing a daily and weekly paper, the *Freeman*, and engaging, with his father, as he had done before going away, in the business of building and selling houses in Brooklyn. But he had now conceived the work which he was to do, to chant the songs of democracy as he understood it, to 'Compose a march for these States.' According to his first biographer, Dr. Bucke, he experienced a sort of conversion, and, like other mystics, felt his life-work given him as a mission. At any rate, he lost interest in other occupations, except so far as was necessary for simple self-support, gave up the successful house-building business, and devoted himself to the composition of his *Leaves of Grass*. This was issued without any publisher, the typesetting and printing having been done partly by Whitman himself, in 1855.

Apparently the last specimen we possess of Whitman's earlier style is the poem 'Sailing the Mississippi at Midnight,' probably written in 1849, and given, as by a rather pleasant irony are all the specimens which we have of his regular verse, in the *Prose Works*. I quote from what seems to be its original form, in the *Notes and Fragments*: —

How solemn! sweeping this dense black tide!
No friendly lights! the heaven o'er us;
A murky darkness on either side,
And kindred darkness all before us!

Now, drawn nearer the shelving rim,
Weird-like shadows suddenly rise;
Shapes of mist and phantoms dim
Baffle the gazer's straining eyes.

Then, by the trick of our own swift motion,
Straight, tall giants, an army vast,
Rank by rank, like the waves of ocean,
On the shore march stilly past.

How solemn! the river a trailing pall,
Which takes, but never again gives back;
And moonless and starless the heaven's arch'd wall,
Responding an equal black!

O, tireless waters! like Life's quick dream,
Onward and onward ever hurrying —
Like death in this midnight hour you seem,
Life in your chill drops greedily burying!

Unlike time you begin and end,
Unlike life you 've a pathway steady,
Unlike earth's are your numberless graves
Ever undug, yet ever ready.

The change from this style to that of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* is so great that it seems as though some connecting links must be found in his newspaper writing of the time. Yet this is doubtful. The first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, he says, was printed 'after many MS. doings and undings,' and possibly all the transition stages were lost in

this repeated revision. The section of 'First Drafts and Rejected Lines and Passages' given in the *Notes and Fragments* does not show this transition, but is entirely in the style of *Leaves of Grass* itself. All that we know of the development of Whitman's peculiar style is what he tells us in one brief sentence: 'I had great trouble in leaving out the stock "poetical" touches, but succeeded at last.'

The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* had practically no sale. Some copies were sent out for review, which received little attention, and some were given away. Only one copy, so far as we know, won a real response, and that was the one sent to Emerson. His letter to Whitman must be quoted in full: —

'I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of "Leaves of Grass." I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seems the sterile and stingy Nature, as if too much handiwork or too much lymph in the temperament were making our western wits fat and mean. I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire.

'I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely of fortifying and encouraging.

'I did not know until I, last night, saw the book advertised in a newspaper, that I could trust the name as real and available for a post-office. I wish to see my benefactor, and have felt much like striking my tasks and visiting New York to pay you my respects.'

Whitman published this letter, together with his own long reply to it, in the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which appeared in 1856. On the back of this edition was printed, over Emerson's name, 'I greet you at the beginning of a great career.' All this was at least in somewhat doubtful taste, but Emerson was above resenting it or retracting anything he had said, though naturally in a private letter, acknowledging the gift of a book from its author, he perhaps expressed himself somewhat otherwise than he would have done in writing for public print. In 1856 he wrote to Carlyle, 'One book last summer came out in New York, a non-descript monster which yet had terrible eyes and buffalo strength, and was indisputably American.' (See the whole letter in the *Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence*, volume ii, page 283.) He visited Whitman in New York, as he had spoken of doing, and friendly relations were kept up between the two till the end of Emerson's life. In 1856 Thoreau also visited Whitman, and wrote of him soon after: 'That Walt Whitman . . . is the most interesting fact to me at present. I have just read his second edition (which he gave me), and it has done me more good than any reading for a long time. . . . There are two or three pieces in the book which are disagreeable, to say the least; simply sensual. . . . On the whole it sounds to me very brave and American, after whatever deductions. I do not believe that all the sermons, so called, that have been preached in this land, put together, are equal to it for preaching. We ought to rejoice greatly in him. . . . Though rude and sometimes ineffectual, it is a great primitive poem, an alarm or trumpet-note ringing through the American camp. . . . Since I have seen him, I find that I am not disturbed by any brag or egotism in his book. He may turn out the least of a braggart of all, having a better right to be confident. He is a great fellow.'

The personal impression Whitman made upon all who ever saw him seems to have been such as to counteract any previous notions they may have had of his work as being either 'egotistic' or 'sensual.' Howells, not a judge prejudiced in his favor, met him in New York in 1860, and speaks of 'the spiritual purity which I felt in him, no less than the dignity.' Howells had previously conceived him as 'the apostle of the rough, the uncouth.' Now he found him to be 'the gentlest person; his barbaric yawp, translated into terms of social encounter, was an address of singular quiet, delivered in a voice of winning and endearing friendliness.'

There are in Whitman's work passages which, though Thoreau's word 'sensual' is by no means the right one to describe them, are anything but fit reading for young ladies' seminaries. Such passages he has in common with nearly all the greatest writers. But naturally at their first appearance they aroused bitter opposition to him, and from time to time this opposition took serious practical form. When the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* was being printed at Boston in 1860, Emerson tried to persuade Whitman to omit these parts of his work. Whitman owns that 'each point of Emerson's statement was unanswerable,' but his own 'unmistakable conviction' that he must leave his work complete, as he understood completeness, was unshaken.

The 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass* contained more than twice as many poems as the edition of 1855. The edition of 1860 was still further augmented, especially by the important collection of poems on men's friendship entitled *Calamus*. Neither of these editions, however, had much sale, and the firm which published the Boston edition failed at the beginning of the war.

Whitman's younger brother, George, enlisted in the Union army, and served throughout the war, rising to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. He was in most of the important battles in Virginia. In 1862 he was wounded at the first battle of Fredericksburg. The wound was thought to be serious (though it did not prove so), and Whitman at an hour's notice started for the army. He spent a considerable part of that winter with the Army of the Potomac, and began the attendance on wounded soldiers which he did not give up until the last hospitals at Washington were closed.

These were the central years of Whitman's life. He gave them almost wholly to his work for the soldiers, living as simply and cheaply as he could, and working in the hospitals almost daily till the end of the war. He assisted constantly in dressing the soldiers' wounds, but he did far more by ministering to their wants in many other ways, and most of all by the health and strength and courage of his own personality. 'A surgeon who throughout the war had charge of one of the largest army hospitals in Washington,' says Dr. Bucke, in his *Life of Whitman*, 'has told the present writer that (without personal acquaintance or any other than professional interest), he watched for many months Walt Whitman's ministrations to the sick and wounded, and was satisfied that he saved many lives.' There are few records, even in those years, of such simple and unselfish devotion as can be found in Whitman's *Specimen Days*, and in his unpremeditated letters, which have now been collected under the title *The Wound-Dresser*. At least one passage must be quoted from an eye-witness, Mr. John Swinton, telling of his hospital visits: 'I first heard of him among the sufferers on the Peninsula after a battle there. Subsequently I saw him, time and again, in the Washington hospitals, or wending his way there with basket or haversack on his arm, and the strength of beneficence suffusing his face. His devotion surpassed the devotion of woman. It would take a volume to tell of his kindness, tenderness, and thoughtfulness.'

'Never shall I forget one night when I accompanied him on his rounds through a hospital, filled with those wounded young Americans whose heroism he has sung in deathless numbers. There were three rows of cots, and each cot bore its man. When he appeared, in passing along, there was a smile of affection and welcome on every face, however wan, and his presence seemed to light up the place as it might be lit by the presence of the Son of Love. From cot to cot they called him, often in tremulous tones or in whispers; they embraced him, they touched his hand, they gazed at him. To one he gave a few words of cheer, for another he wrote a letter home, to others he gave an orange, a few comfits, a cigar, a pipe and tobacco, a sheet of paper or a postage stamp, all of which and many other things were in his capacious haversack. From another he would receive a dying message for mother, wife, or sweetheart; for another he would promise to go on an errand; to another, some special friend, very low, he would give a manly farewell kiss. He did the things for them which no nurse or doctor could do, and he seemed to leave a benediction at every cot as he passed along. The lights had gleamed for hours in the hospital that night before he left it, and as he took his way towards the door, you could hear the voice of many a stricken hero calling, "Walt, Walt, Walt, come again! come again!"'

Drum Taps, Whitman's poems of the war, was published in 1865, and the *Sequel to Drum Taps*, containing his memorial poems on Lincoln, and a few more war poems, later in the year. It is surprising that these attracted so little attention as they did. Yet we must remember that it has always taken at least a generation for the general public to accept any original form of rhythmic expression, especially a form so different from accepted standards, and apparently so uncouth, as Whitman's. Of the substance of the poems, their vividness and truth, it is unnecessary to speak here. But it may be noted in passing, that, while there is more of the war in his work than in that of any other poet, there is nowhere any touch of bitterness or even of hostility.

Toward the end of the war Whitman obtained a position as clerk in the Department of the Interior. Not long afterward the Secretary of the Interior, James Harlan, came across Whitman's copy of *Leaves of Grass* (the 1860 edition) which he was revising for republication, and at once discharged Whitman as 'the author of an indecent book.' Whitman soon obtained an equally good position in the office of the Attorney-General, but the incident called out a famous defence of Whitman and arraignment of Harlan, in W. D. O'Connor's pamphlet *The Good Gray Poet*. This defence and arraignment are so exaggerated in tone that they have probably done Whitman's reputation more harm than good, and have made people feel that anything written by a disciple of his must be taken with very large allowances. Yet the pamphlet is admirable at least for its intense loyalty, and for its title, which was a creation of genius. Whitman has been called ever since, and deservedly, 'The Good Gray Poet.'

The new and revised edition (the fourth) of *Leaves of Grass*, with *Drum Taps* added, was published in 1867. In 1871 was published the fifth edition, with 'Passage to India' and other important additions. In 1872 Whitman was asked to give the Commencement poem at Dartmouth College, and he delivered 'As a strong bird on pinions free' (now 'Thou mother with thy equal brood'). In 'Passage to India' and in the later poems that group themselves with it, we have Whitman's work under a somewhat new aspect. From the beginning he had said, 'I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,' and had insisted always on the unity of the two and on their equal claims. But both by temperament and by fixed intention he had expressed primarily the material side of things and of man (as he said, the side most neglected by other poets), glorying in the triumphs of modern industrialism and in the joys of physical health. Now (see the passages quoted in notes on pages 546 and 590, and the whole of his own note on 'Passage to India' in the *Complete Prose Works*, pages 272-274, as well as the poem itself and those that follow), he insists most on the other aspect of the dual unity, on the spirit, that 'laughs at what you call dissolution,' and knows it has the best of time and space. The changes which he made in the brief poem 'Assurances' (page 553) from one edition to another, until it found its final form as given in the 1871 edition with 'Passage to India,' are typical of this development.

Whitman was one of the healthiest of men. Those who have described his work in the hospitals say that health and strength seemed to radiate from his presence. All his life he had lived a great deal in the open air, and in the hospital years he depended on his long walks about Washington as his chief delight and relief. But by 1864 his health began to be broken down. He had the first illness of his life, called at first 'hospital malaria,' in the hot summer of that year. Dr. Platt, in his life of Whitman, says also that through a scratch in his hand he was infected with septic poisoning from a wound he was helping to dress. This seemed to have only a temporary effect, but he was never entirely well afterward. In January, 1873, he had a paralytic stroke, which for a while disabled his left side completely. After a time he recovered somewhat, but could never move freely. For the first two years he suffered severely, and he was an invalid for the nineteen years that followed. His work at Washington was of course ended, and he had no source of income but his books, which hardly brought him anything.

During these years he lived at Camden, N. J., the home of George Whitman. Almost in poverty, until 1881, when the sale of his works began to bring him a small income, — which enabled him to live with some slight degree of comfort in a home of his own, —

and in constant weakness and much of the time helplessness, he underwent a test such as few men have been subjected to, and one which was particularly severe for him, the lover of all physical joys and especially of free movement in the open air. He met this test with complete triumph. All who saw him at Camden — and his home became to some degree a goal of pilgrimage, especially in the last ten years of his life — bear witness to the sweetness and strength of the character that revealed itself in him.

The so-called 'Centennial Edition' of *Leaves of Grass* was issued in 1876, with a second volume, composed partly of prose and partly of verse. By 1879 Whitman had partially recovered from his paralysis, and was able to take a journey through the Western States in that year, and in the following year to Canada. In 1881 the seventh edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published by James R. Osgood & Co. of Boston, but six months after its publication, when some two thousand copies had been sold, the firm was threatened with prosecution by the Massachusetts District Attorney, and declined to continue the sale of the book. It was immediately after published at Philadelphia. In 1888 was added the collection called *November Boughs*, in 1891 were published *Good-bye My Fancy* and the tenth edition of *Leaves of Grass*, including these last two additions. Whitman's health had been steadily declining again since 1885; he suffered a second shock of paralysis in 1888, but lived on, still cheerful and mentally active, and happy in a few devoted friends, until 1892, when he died, March 26. The small collection, *Old Age Echoes*, was added to his *Leaves of Grass* in the 1897 edition, *Calamus* (letters to his friend Peter Doyle) was published in 1897, *The Wound Dresser* in 1898, *An American Primer* and the *Diary in Canada* in 1904.

The question whether Walt Whitman's work is properly to be called poetry at all or not still exists only in a few academic circles. It has always been largely a question of academic definitions. And while we must have some definiteness of conception, in order that our ideas may not become entirely vague and our words meaningless, it would be well in this case to imitate Whitman's own modesty when he says: 'Let me not dare, here or anywhere, for my own purposes, or any purposes, to attempt the definition of Poetry, nor answer the question what it is. Like Religion, Love, Nature, while those terms are indispensable, and we all give a sufficiently accurate meaning to them, in my opinion no definition that has ever been made sufficiently encloses the name Poetry.' It may be added that one of the chief functions of any strongly original poet — or thinker — is to compel us to enlarge our definitions.

But even without departing greatly from the traditional conceptions of poetry, and certainly without abandoning the idea that material for poetry, however noble or beautiful, does not truly become poetry until it has been put into rhythmic form, we are now beginning frankly to accept Whitman's work as poetry. We no longer need the excellent authority of John Addington Symonds, a critic competent above most others and especially devoted to beauty of form in verse, to tell us that Whitman's verse is wonderfully rhythmical, and that his rhythms are truly and often delicately fitted to what he has to express. It is only needful really to read Whitman, a thing which is often at first difficult to do and which people in general have not even yet learned to do — to read him in the mass — and above all to read him aloud, which is the final test of poetry — in order to feel the strength and fitness of his rhythms, and to realize that they are not the rhythms of prose, nor of that bastard form called poetic prose, but are distinctly metrical rhythms, that is, the rhythms of verse. For the most part, they hold among verse-rhythms somewhat the same place as the recitative and the chant (names which he often gives to his poems) hold in music. He has also, when he chooses, the lyric note. The distinction between his recitative and his lyric, when he uses them together, as in 'Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,' or 'When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,' is just the same and just as clearly marked as that between regular lyrics and regular blank verse.

It has taken people so long, however, to settle for themselves, consciously or unconsciously, this preliminary question of whether Whitman's work was poetry at all or not, that they have only just begun to appreciate his power and to give him his true rank.

Professor Trent, in his recent *History of American Literature* (1903), calls him 'too large a man and poet for adequate comprehension at present.' Moreover, Americans have been somewhat alienated from Whitman by the attitude of the best foreign critics, who have found in him the one and only poet truly characteristic of America. Not really having taken the trouble to know Whitman, but having conceived of him and his work as something rough, rowdyish, uncultured and altogether materialistic and sensual, Americans were naturally offended that he, rather than men like Longfellow, Lowell, and Emerson, should be taken as typical of America. We felt that all the chief American poets (except Poe, the only one whose work could have been written elsewhere than in America) were typical; and that the breadth of culture in such men as Longfellow and Lowell made them only the more completely typical. We naturally sought in the typical American poet an expression of our whole life and character, including (as Whitman himself has said somewhere) our inheritance of all the best from past ages and foreign lands; while the foreign critic, as naturally, sought in him the expression of only that part of our life which is entirely new and strange — and if uncouth and rude, so much the better. We have now come to know Whitman more truly; to know that he was anything but the rowdy and materialist of our first conceptions; to know that while he did not lack culture in the narrower sense (having read and thoroughly digested Emerson, having understood Carlyle and in his own thought refuted and gone beyond him, having won some genuine knowledge of Fichte's thought and Hegel's, if not directly of Plato's, and having nourished himself on the few greatest writers, Shakspeare, the Bible, and Homer — even though in translation, some genuine knowledge of which is better than our usual pretence at knowledge of the original) he also had that broader and better first-hand culture which comes from true human relations with many living men and women, forming out of them a character which stood some of the hardest tests of life. We have also become more ready to admit that those material aspects of our life which primarily, though by no means exclusively, he tried to express, are in their crudeness and power truly characteristic of America. And now, knowing him better, we see that he has expressed not only some material aspects, but also some essential ideals of America, as no other poet has: among them, our sense of freedom and independence (his work is the logical outcome of Emerson's address on 'The American Scholar'), our conception of real democratic equality, our intense individualism yet sense of union one with another in a great whole.

SIDNEY LANIER

SIDNEY LANIER was born at Macon, Ga., February 3, 1842. He came of a family of musicians, the earliest known ancestor having been attached to the court of Queen Elizabeth, and his son and grandson having been directors of music under Charles I and Charles II. The grandson was one of the incorporators and the first Marshal of the Society of Musicians under Charles II, and there were four others of the name of Lanier among the incorporators. Thomas Lanier came to America in 1716, and settled in Virginia. Lanier's father was a lawyer, living at Macon, Ga., and his mother was a Virginian of Scotch descent, of a family distinguished in politics and also skilled in music.

Sidney Lanier had from his childhood a strong ambition, and we may even say genius, for music. As a boy he seemed able to learn any instrument without instruction, and could play the flute, violin, organ, piano, and guitar before he could fairly read. His greatest passion was for the violin, but his father persuaded him to abandon it. His sensitive nature was hardly able to bear the exaltation produced in him by its notes. In deference to his father's wishes, he devoted himself chiefly to the flute.

When he was fourteen years old, he entered Oglethorpe College (or 'University,' as it called itself), in the sophomore class. After losing a year by outside work, he graduated at the age of eighteen, sharing the highest honors for scholarship with one of his classmates, and was immediately appointed tutor in the college. This was in 1860. In 1861 he gave up his position to volunteer as a private in the Confederate army. He was in the battles of

Seven Pines, Malvern Hill, and others. The following year his younger brother, Clifford, joined him, and both served as privates (though promotion was offered to each at different times, and to Sidney Lanier three times), in order not to be separated from each other. They were transferred to the Signal Service in 1862, and in 1863 their company was mounted and served in Virginia and North Carolina. Finally they were appointed signal officers on blockade-runners, and thus necessarily separated. Sidney Lanier was captured, with his vessel, and imprisoned for five months at Point Lookout. In February, 1865, he was released, and returned home to Georgia on foot, with his flute, from which he had never been separated. His strength was seriously impaired, and though he recovered from a dangerous illness of six weeks, the beginning of consumption, from which his mother had just died, was already upon him. The rest of his life was a struggle against the disease.

He was still only twenty-three years old, and had not found his vocation in life, though strong musical and literary ambitions were already awake in him. But he was led to think that music was not a serious career, not worth devoting his life to. While working as clerk in a hotel, he took up and completed in three weeks of April, 1867, his novel, *Tiger Lilies* (begun at Burwell's Bay in 1863, and continued in 1865), and in May took the story to New York to be published. It is a picture of the war, hastily drawn, and of course somewhat crude. It expresses strongly, however, the horror of war which had constantly grown in him during the progress of that struggle which he would not abandon until it was ended. He describes war as 'that strange, terrible flower of which the most wonderful specimen yet produced was grown by two wealthy planters of North America.' 'It is supposed by some,' he goes on (the passage is quoted in Dr. Ward's *Memorial*), 'that the seed of this American specimen (now dead) yet remains in the land; but as for this author (who, with many friends, suffered from the unhealthy odors of the plant), he could find it in his heart to wish fervently that this seed, if there be verily any, might perish in the germ, utterly out of sight and life and memory, and out of the remote hope of resurrection, forever and ever, no matter in whose granary they are cherished!' The novel was published, but had little success. He returned to the South, and taught school for a year. In 1867 he was married to Miss Mary Day, of Macon. For five years following, he studied and practised law with his father.

During this time he had written but little in verse, yet some of that little was of exquisite quality. The first poems we have are those of 1865, 'The Dying Words of Stonewall Jackson' and 'The Tournament,' the second of which he used with some alterations in his 'Psalm of the West,' eleven years later. The lyric 'Night and Day' belongs to 1866, and in 1868 the 'Jacquerie' was planned and partly written. In 1868 he wrote also a lyric, 'Life and Song,' the last two lines of which have been often quoted in speaking of his life and of the poetry which was as yet hardly begun:—

His song was only living aloud,
His work, a singing with his hand.

There was little written in the following years, until 1874, except three dialect poems of Georgia life.

He could not remain devoted to the law, however. He felt more and more that his life was to be brief, and that he must do something in art, which is lasting.

'Were it not for some considerations which make such a proposition seem absurd in the highest degree,' he wrote to his wife early in 1873, 'I would think that I am shortly to die, and that my spirit hath been singing its swan-song before dissolution. All day my soul hath been cutting swiftly into the great space of the subtle, unspeakable deep, driven by wind after wind of heavenly melody.' He determined to devote himself for what was left of his life to music and literature. He tried New York, but finally settled in Baltimore, in December of this year, 1873, having obtained an engagement there as first flute in the Peabody Symphony Orchestra. He wrote to his father, who had protested against his purpose as unwise: 'My dear father, think how, for twenty years, through poverty, through pain, through weariness, through sickness, through the uncongenial

atmosphere of a farcical college and of a bare army and then of an exacting business life, through all the discouragement of being wholly unacquainted with literary people and literary ways,—I say, think how, in spite of all these depressing circumstances, and of a thousand more which I could enumerate, these two figures of music and of poetry have steadily kept in my heart so that I could not banish them. Does it not seem to you as to me, that I begin to have the right to enroll myself among the devotees of these two sublime arts, after having followed them so long and so humbly, and through so much bitterness?' His father felt the force of this appeal, and generously helped Lanier, so far as he could, to carry out his ambitions.

At Baltimore he found what he had craved for, the opportunity to hear good music, and access to extensive libraries. In the comparative freedom and exhilaration of this new life were written the first poems really characteristic of his mature work, among them the beautiful tributes to Mrs. Lanier, 'My Springs,' 'In Absence,' 'Acknowledgment,' and 'Laus Mariae.' It was in the summer of 1874, in August, that he wrote his first poem which attracted attention, 'Corn.' This poem opens with stanzas almost as beautiful as anything in Lanier's work, describing the full richness of summer in the South. As a whole, however, it is not entirely successful. The symphonic structure is not sustained to the end, and much of the last part of the poem is given to a description of the effect on Southern farmers of cotton speculation, and especially of borrowing money at ruinous rates to plant cotton instead of corn. That subject was quite in place in Lanier's dialect poems, 'Jones's Private Argument,' and 'Thar's more in the man than thar is in the land,' but here, in a poem of the quality of 'Corn,' it jars, and in both substance and expression is quite out of harmony with the rest of the poem. 'Corn,' though it is interesting historically as having won for Lanier his first recognition when it appeared in *Lippincott's Magazine* for February, 1875, and also for its attempt to express fitly in poetry the beauty of waving fields of our chief American grain, must, in final critical judgment, be accounted a failure. This is the less to be regretted because Lanier immediately after succeeded, with 'The Symphony,' in the chief things which he had failed to do in 'Corn.' In 'The Symphony,' published only four months later in the same magazine, he created a poem of real harmonic and symphonic structure throughout, and of far greater musical beauty than he had even attempted in 'Corn,' and he achieved the amazing *tour de force* of making real poetry out of the money question. A little later, in a brief lyric, 'The Waving of the Corn,' he expresses the full beauty of the cornfield.

'The Symphony' won him the friendship of Bayard Taylor,—a friendship which grew as the two men came to know each other better, and which is recorded in the letters that passed between them. His letters to another firm friend, Mr. Gibson Peacock, are also preserved, and are of great interest. He was devoted to a serious study of his two arts, and especially of the relations between them. Often he was compelled to interrupt his work either to go in search of health to Florida or Pennsylvania or the mountains of North Carolina, or to do hack writing for a mere living. But he persisted, with help and encouragement from his father and brother, from his friends, and most of all from his wife. To her he wrote: "Que mon nom soit flétri, que la France soit libre!" quoth Danton; which is to say, interpreted by my environment: Let my name perish—the poetry is good poetry and the music is good music, and beauty dieth not, and the heart that needs it will find it.' He was chosen in 1876, at the instance of Bayard Taylor, to write the words of the Centennial Cantata, for which the music was composed by Dudley Buck. In this year he wrote also the beautiful 'Evening Song,' possibly his finest lyric; the poem 'Clover,' which ranks between 'Corn' and 'The Symphony,' and has something of the qualities of both; 'The Waving of the Corn,' just spoken of; and our finest Centennial poem (not forgetting Lowell's and Whitman's), the 'Psalm of the West.'

Meanwhile he was lecturing for schools and for private classes, writing descriptive articles in prose for *Lippincott's Magazine*, making a book on Florida for a railroad company (published by the Lippincotts in 1876), and cheerfully doing whatever he could to earn himself a living and win some leisure for original writing. In 1877 was published the

first collection of his *Poems*, and this year was the one most productive of new pieces, though of brief ones. Such a condensed bit of lyric as 'The Stirrup-Cup,' however, is worth many a long poem. To this year belong also the 'Song of the Chattahoochee' (one of his most popular lyrics, though perhaps not ultimately to be counted among the few of his very best), two of his best brief nature poems, 'Tampa Robins' and 'From the Flats' (the last is bound to haunt forever all true lovers of the hills), 'The Mocking-Bird,' 'The Bee,' 'Florida Sunday,' and the poems 'To Wagner' and 'To Beethoven.'

His two best ballads, 'The Revenge of Hamish' and 'How Love looked for Hell,' belong to 1878-79. The first seems to me unsurpassed in narrative technique. Objectivity can no farther go. It is a masterpiece of absolute detachment, yet of wonderful vividness. The second is also remarkable for the way in which it clothes abstractions with life, and makes vivid the vague idea that where Love comes, there Hell cannot be. These, each unique in its kind, and, belonging to the same year, his chief masterpiece in still another kind which is peculiarly his own, being a new creation, — 'The Marshes of Glynn,' — show the many possibilities of that talent which was not to reach its full development.

Bayard Taylor died in December, 1878, and Lanier wrote the poem 'To Bayard Taylor,' with its beautiful picture of the Elysium of the poets, its touches of Elizabethan phrasing, and, toward the end, its strong, condensed expression of the hard conditions and the struggle which were bearing heavily upon Lanier himself, but from which he was soon to escape into that open sun-lit land of the last two stanzas.

He had work still to do, however. Early in 1879 he was appointed Lecturer on English Literature in the Johns Hopkins University. This brought him the happy certainty of a fixed though small income. For his courses of 1879-80 and 1880-81 he prepared the lectures which, in revised form, now constitute his two most important prose volumes, *The Science of English Verse* and *The English Novel and its Development*. He made an engagement with the Scribners to complete a series of books for boys, of which four were published, two after his death: *The Boy's Froissart* (1878), *The Boy's King Arthur* (1880), *The Boy's Mabinogion* (1881), and *The Boy's Percy* (1882). In the winter of 1880-81 he was barely able to get through with twelve lectures at the University. The poem 'Sunrise' was written with a fever temperature of 104, when, says Mrs. Lanier, 'the hand which first pencilled its lines had not strength to carry nourishment to the lips.' A last attempt to prolong his life was made by trying tent life in the mountains of North Carolina, but it was unsuccessful, and he died September 7, 1881.

Though younger by almost a generation than our chief elder poets, Lanier seems to be taking his rank almost without question among them. He did not complete his work. To his poet friend, Paul H. Hayne, he wrote: 'How I long to sing a thousand songs that oppress me, unsung, — is inexpressible. Yet the mere work that brings bread gives me no time.' When he died, his talent was growing. Unlike Poe, if he had lived he would probably have given us greater poems than he did. It is therefore hard to say what would have proved really characteristic of him had he completed any large mass of work. As it is, he has given us some beautiful and haunting lyrics, sometimes with touches of strange fancies like those in 'Night and Day' and the 'Ballad of Trees and the Master'; he has written two of our finest ballads, both unique in kind; in the 'Psalm of the West' he has written a poem of America that for range and beauty and historical completeness, and for the sweep of the whole from its superb opening up to just near the close, where it fails a little, deserves to stand beside or even above Lowell's 'Commemoration Ode' and Whitman's 'Thou mother with thy equal brood.' And finally, there is one thing which, even in the small amount of his work, we may call distinctively characteristic, — the way of writing found in two poems so different in substance as 'The Symphony' and 'The Marshes of Glynn.' 'Whatever turn I have for art,' he wrote to Paul H. Hayne, 'is purely musical, poetry being with me a mere tangent into which I shoot sometimes. . . . The very deepest of my life has been filled with music, which I have studied and cultivated far more than poetry.' Something of this music-passion has woven itself into his poetry. His theory that English verse has for its essential basis not accent, but strict

musical quantity, is almost certainly a mistaken one. But the book he wrote to prove this mistaken theory is by far the most suggestive and inspiring that has ever dealt with the technique of verse. And in his own work he has written poetry more rich in music than we had before. He has learned all that there was to be learned from his predecessors, among them Swinburne, and then he has found for himself new melodies, and has taught something of them to the poets of a younger generation, — notably Bliss Carman and Richard Hovey.